

Alumni on the Move

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As told to Karen Christensen

My job

Algorithmics Incorporated is a Canadian company that is leading the way in the development of risk measurement and management tools and processes. My role involves responsibility for the field organization, sales, and the whole professional services side. It also involves an operational role, overseeing our finance function and legal department. I was one of the first to join the company in 1989. We are now Canada's second-largest private software company, and in terms of public companies, we're around number seven. Risk management solutions did not exist as an industry ten or 15 years ago, so we helped design this space.

The key skills it takes

In such a young industry, it's crucial to have strong technical credibility, so that I can talk to key decision makers about the issues of the day. Secondly, my internal role requires strong communication skills – an ability to explain what our key objectives are and maintain a focus on them. Because a lot of what we do is new, ill-defined and fairly complex, classic problem solving skills and an ability to find a path through uncertainty are key.

My key challenge

These days, it's defining 'who we are' as a company. We started out as a software vendor, so for many years, the majority of our thinking was around research and development. But as we mature, we are focusing more and more on how we handle our customers. Part of offering solutions involves paying more attention to the services we provide around the software – things like product implementation and the client's ability to extract optimal value from the software. This is a massive cultural transformation for us: taking an organization that defined itself around its products, and moving it toward an organization that is more service-oriented.

What effective leaders look like

Credibility is the key. True leaders are seen as knowing what they are talking about, and also, meaning what they say. This is probably the biggest asset a leader can have, and also one that – if lost – is almost impossible to get back. Also, an ability to reduce complexity, to communicate essential aspects, and communicate consistently. People need to know where we're starting from and where we're heading. In a very uncertain world, some sense of stability is key, and true leaders provide that.



Canada's Top Forty Under Forty

The highlight of being named to *Canada's Top Forty Under Forty* was a two-day offsite session, called The Top 40 Institute. It brought together people who have had an impact on the community – either in the business, public, private, or social domains. It was really great to talk to my peers – other young leaders in challenging roles. There were people there from all walks of life, and I was honoured to be included.

Remaining calm in the face of chaos

People ask me how I stay so calm and relaxed all the time. I don't do anything special, but I do take great satisfaction in the simple things in life. I've got a wonderful family, and I love coming home and playing with my kids. On a Sunday, we might head up to the cottage – out of cell phone range. Or I might take my eldest skiing (Michael and his wife have a son, age 9, and twin daughters, age 3). I make a point to 'switch off' from work as soon as I get home.

My philosophy of life

In everyone's life – professional and personal – there are things that go well, and things that don't. The biggest challenge is dealing with the problems that arise. I always try to keep a sense of proportion. You can't get too focused on the one thing out of ten that didn't go well. In the end, there are things we can influence, and things we can't. Stop and ask yourself, 'can I change this?' If yes, go ahead and change it; if not, accept it as a constraint and work around it, instead of spending the rest of your life worrying about it.