

Trust at the Heart of Lamarre's Story

Jacques Lamarre, president and CEO of **SNC-Lavalin Group Inc.**, continued the tradition of *National Post Business* Canadian CEOs of the Year appearing in the *Rotman Integrative Thinking™ Seminar Series* on January 11. Previous winners/speakers include **Philip Orsino**, **Domenic D'Alessandro** and **Richard Currie**.

A civil engineer, Lamarre joined **Lavalin Inc.** in 1968. After succeeding in increasingly senior roles, he was named president and CEO of SNC-Lavalin Group in 1996, five years after his employer merged with **SNC Group**.

SNC-Lavalin has 12,000 permanent employees (contractors boost the number of personnel to about 35,000) working in more than 100 countries. SNC-Lavalin companies provide engineering, procurement, construction, and financing services to a variety of sectors, including biopharmaceuticals, environment, mass transit, mining, power and water management.

An experience early in Lamarre's career shaped his approach to leadership and defines the culture at present-day SNC-Lavalin, he says: a road-building project in Niger was stuck in neutral, having built a

paltry five kilometres of highway in two years. There was dissent between the 100 Canadian and 600 local workers, which included soldiers from the Niger army. "They felt that the army should be used for something more useful," Lamarre says.

A 29-year-old Lamarre was assigned to the remote locale, a five hour flight from the nearest city, to complete the project. "When we met with the workers, we asked them, 'What will you achieve in the next five days?'" recalls Lamarre. "The week after, I said, 'You didn't do what you told me you would do. Just tell me what you will do. Even if it's very small, just be sure you do it, because if you don't do it next time, you will have to leave the site.' Slowly, by asking them what they could deliver and trusting them, it became a completely different picture."

Under his leadership, 150 kilometres of highway was built the following year. "I wasn't trying to be the nice guy; I was just there to make sure that the people succeeded," he says. "It was a question of trust, and the same principle has applied everywhere in my life since that time. You give people the facts, and it's amazing what they will deliver. I



Jacques Lamarre

gave the Niger truck drivers all the information I could, and all of a sudden, they felt like the owners of the company."

Lamarre calls it "distributed leadership," and the approach is prevalent throughout SNC-Lavalin. When projects are reported on at board meetings, financial results are listed alongside the project manager's name, rather than the project name. "If you are in the back of the room and you see your name, and you did not achieve your target, the effect is incredible," says Lamarre. "[The manager] is under the carpet and the only thing to do is help him or her up and say, 'Don't get discouraged, next time you will do better.' Everybody feels that they have ownership of their project, they have all the information, and that makes a huge difference."

by *Matthew Fox*

Rotman School Raises Over \$65,000 for Tsunami Relief



Anusha Shanmugarajah (MBA '05)

A fundraising initiative led by Rotman MBA students raised over \$65,000 for Asia Earthquake and Tsunami relief. Spearheaded by **Anusha Shanmugarajah** (MBA '05) in cooperation with the **Graduate Business**

Council and **Rotman Outreach**, the initiative was launched the first week of January, with an initial goal of \$5,000 to be donated to the **Canadian Red Cross**.

Donations from Rotman students, faculty and staff totaled \$16,450, which was then matched by Rotman Dean **Roger Martin** and his wife **Nancy Lang**. The donation also qualified for matching funds from the Canadian government, bringing the total to \$65,800.

Many Rotman students and faculty are from South East Asia and have friends and family who were directly affected by the events of December 26, which fueled the fundraising drive, according to Shanmugarajah. "This tragedy touched the hearts and

souls of all of us at Rotman. We are extremely pleased that we vastly surpassed our fundraising goal," she says.

Ontario Premier **Dalton McGuinty** was impressed by the School's efforts, writing a letter to the Dean that read, in part, "I have tremendous respect for all you and everyone at the Rotman School have done. When the world is dealt a staggering blow, the people of our province reach out with charity and kindness."

Adds Shanmugarajah, "The response to this crisis was a reminder of the truly global nature of our program. It is an honour to be a member of such compassionate and civic-minded community." □

by *Ken McGuffin*