

## Etta St. John Wileman Award Winner Interview

It is with great honour that the editors of *The Canadian Journal of Career Development* bring you a special series of interviews with past Etta St. John Wileman award winners. The Etta St. John Wileman Award for Lifetime Achievement in Career Development is designed to recognize and celebrate individuals who have devoted their lives to furthering the profession of career development. The winners of this award have established themselves as leaders within their profession; devoted their lives to the enhancement of career development practice, administration, research, and education; and personify the role of researcher, educator, author, practitioner, and career leader.

These individuals have all contributed in their own unique way to the identity of the career development profession in Canada. It is through these interviews that our readers will get to see different perspectives, and perhaps gather some inspiration for their own work and career development.



### Donald Lawson

Award Winner  
2015

Donald Lawson is an accomplished businessman with an exemplary record of hands-on service to his community. In 2015, Donald was recognized for his lifetime of achievement in supporting the career development sector across Canada.

Donald's record of community service began nearly 60 years ago with the YMCA of Metropolitan Toronto. After serving in various capacities within the Y, he became its Chairman at a time when it was approaching bankruptcy. Donald helped to articulate a vision of what a renewed Y could mean to the community and personally raised millions of dollars over the span of more than a decade. His efforts

helped to make the YMCA of Greater Toronto one of the most active and respected charitable organizations in the community.

Since assuming the role of Chairman of The Counselling Foundation of Canada in 1984, Donald has led the expansion and updating of the organization's mandate, which would see a Foundation that would advance innovative programming and reflect the changing needs of Canadians. Much of these efforts has been focused on two streams: providing resources and professional development opportunities for career practitioners, and helping those who live on the margins of society achieve their potential.

Recognition for Donald's accomplishments and volunteer work has come in the form of *Officer of the Fellowship of Honour* of the Canadian YMCA, *Honourary Doctor of Laws* from Dalhousie University, and *Honourary Doctor of Sacred Letters* from Victoria University (University of Toronto).

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**CJCD:** Good Morning Donald. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. To start off, can you tell me a little about your own career development?

**Donald:** First of all, my career was in business not the career development field; however, career explo-



ration was encouraged at a young age. When I was about ten years of age, my father (Frank G. Lawson, founder of The Counselling Foundation of Canada) brought home a psychologist who had my sisters and me take some tests which, when interpreted, outlined our characteristics and potential career paths. My results indicated I was headed for business and I grew up assuming I would join my father in his business. I later took the Kudor Interest and other tests at the YMCA Counselling Service and the results confirmed my career path.

I entered the business world as one of three next generation young men in the Investment Brokerage firm led by my father (Moss, Lawson & Co). I was encouraged immediately to join the Toronto Junior Board of Trade (TJBT), at that time a group of 650 young men. The TJBT was a Member Unit of The Junior Chamber of Commerce Canada (Canada Jaycees). The purpose of the group was fellowship and self-development. If we took on a project, learning by doing and accepting leadership were as important as the project itself. It also provided Public Speaking courses which helped me with both prepared and impromptu speeches. I advanced into leadership roles by year two. When retired from the TJBT on reaching the age limit, I was awarded a Senatorship in Junior Chamber International in recognition of my contribution to the TJBT during my period of membership.

At the same as I began my business career, I became involved with an adult group at the North Toronto Branch of the YMCA and soon was among the group's leaders. My professional development in business often informed my philanthropic interests. For instance, the YMCA offered a course in Human Relations and Early Childhood Development through which I included

the four essential learnings for healthy early childhood development. This was a big help in understanding and helping in the development of our own children, and youth in general.

A second example developed when I was given the task of chairing the committee "Leadership Development" at the TJBT, I put together a set of training materials on Parliamentary Procedure and how to run or chair a meeting. When I showed my materials to one of the YMCA staff I was working with, he responded, "So what? Procedures aren't leadership." He put me in touch with two teachers who conducted classes in Group Dynamics. I brought the teachers and course to the TJBT where it was very successfully received. Role-playing was an important part in the program, showing many facets of what can happen at a meeting, and how people will react and behave depends on how they are treated. Subsequently, another TJBT member and I started offering these classes for other Junior Chamber of Commerce units. These learnings of Group Dynamics have put me in good stead throughout the rest of my career, and all of my subsequent leadership activities.

My business career included bookkeeping, management, client services, and client portfolio management. During all of those 58 years, I was also involved in business related and philanthropic related associations. On the business side, I spent several years on committees and eight years as a Member of The Board of Governors of the Toronto Stock Exchange, with the final year as Chairman of the Board. I also served on the Ontario and National Boards of the Investment Dealers Association of Canada.

In the world of philanthropy, I have served as Chairman of the Board of the YMCA of Greater Toronto; Director and Officer of The

Big Sister Association of Metropolitan Toronto (now known as Youthlink); Member of the Board of Regents of Victoria College (University of Toronto); Member of the Board of Directors of the Georgian Bay Land Trust (GBLT); and served on United Way budget panels. I have also had a significant role raising funds for YMCA, Victoria College, and the GBLT. Finally, and most relevant to this discussion, I have served as Chair of the Board of The Counselling Foundation of Canada since 1984, and was a founding Director of CERIC.

**CJCD:** That is amazing. You have had a very busy and meaningful career. Can you share any mentors in your life that influenced your career development?

**Donald:** My first mentor was my father. He built and led a business, took time to meet with and help aspiring young leaders, and was very involved in leadership, principally at The Toronto Stock Exchange, The Toronto Board of Trade Club, and the Toronto YMCA. He obtained satisfaction from doing good; he did not need or seek recognition for his philanthropy. Many gifts were made anonymously. As well, he frequently opened doors for me to become involved in a number of activities and volunteering opportunities.

Reginald Bundy of the YMCA, who taught me Human Relations and Early Childhood Development, was another mentor. And the two gentlemen who taught Group Dynamics were certainly very important.

**CJCD:** What are some of the lessons you have learned along the way?

**Donald:** Being involved with leaders in all of my activities has presented several opportunities for personal growth. When I entered



university I became involved with the class leaders at the outset. Many of those class leaders remained life-long friends. It was here that I learned the importance of being associated with leaders, because they are the people who make things happen.

The other lesson came out of the YMCA. I grew to understand that the essential genius of the Y was the influence that one individual could have on another in any and all activities; through volunteerism and mentorship, one person could have a profound effect on those around them and their community.

**CJCD:** Having had years of experience from being on the board of the YMCA, the Board of Victoria College, the Chairman of The Counselling Foundation of Canada, and other areas of work, can you share your perspective on Canadian career development?

**Donald:** Career development in Canada has certainly evolved over the years. In 1944, the Toronto YMCA was encouraged to create a Counselling Service that would be there to help returning servicemen from wartime to enter working activities that would be meaningful for them and the economy. Dr. Gerald Cosgrave was hired as Director of the Service. My father was involved from the beginning and became Chair of the Service in its second year. He held that office until Cosgrave retired in the late 1950s.

My father created The Counselling Foundation of Canada, partially as a cover for his personal philanthropy, but also to create and enrich counselling programs and improve technical skills of counsellors across the country. When Gerald Cosgrave retired from the YMCA, father hired him to continue to develop his ideas and write manuals in career development. Cosgrave was given an office on the York Univer-

sity campus. The President of York University at the time, Dr. Murray Ross, had also been active in the YMCA. With Father's persuasion and funding, York became the first university in Canada to include Practical Psychology in its undergraduate and post-graduate Psychology courses. The goal was to graduate practicing, rather than solely research, psychologists. Elizabeth McTavish, initially brought in as a program assistant, followed Gerald Cosgrave as Executive Director of the Foundation in 1974. In 1975, a conference called National Consultation on Career Development (NATCON) was created. In 1987, with the gathering being threatened by government fiscal restraint, Elizabeth convinced the Board of the Foundation to join with the University of Toronto Career Centre, led by Marilyn Van Norman, and Human Resources Canada to take on the responsibility and leadership of NATCON. Under this partnership, NATCON became the largest bilingual conference on career development. It became the leading professional training venue for practitioners for over fifteen years. Attendance grew to around twelve hundred practitioners from coast to coast in Canada, United States, Asia, Australia, and Europe.

After about fifteen years, the NATCON partnership dissolved and NATCON soon ceased to exist. Elizabeth McTavish was succeeded as Executive Director of the Foundation by Jean Faulds in 1996. Under Jean Faulds leadership, in 2004 the Foundation helped to create the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC). CERIC was able to undertake some activities which the Foundation could not do directly. CERIC proceeded to create Cannexus, a national conference patterned after, and designed to replace, NATCON. Cannexus has grown steadily and is

the nationally recognized forum for professional development by career practitioners in Canada, with a growing participation from many other countries. In 2008, Jean Faulds was succeeded by Bruce Lawson. Bruce has been focused on building CERIC's programs, shining a light on the needs of marginalized young people, particularly Aboriginal and immigrant youth, and working collaboratively with other stakeholders to help tackle some of our country's systemic challenges.

**CJCD:** Those are some good milestones and I am sure many resonate with our readers. Now I'd like to know, what do you see as the challenges facing career development in Canada?

**Donald:** I believe a clear and prominent brand and common language are needed for career development practitioners and the Canadians they serve; the career development field is highly fragmented across society, so it means that the important work of practitioners is not as well known or understood as it should be amongst the general public. Also, I think more links and integration between the education system, local labour market information, career practitioners and the needs of the workplace, would strengthen career exploration for young people.

**CJCD:** In your opinion, what does the future of career development in Canada look like?

**Donald:** The future holds growth and recognition of the importance of career practitioners, as well as positive impact on economic development achieved through helping Canadians find satisfying and meaningful careers through career development.



**CJCD:** I hope that your future vision happens soon. In closing, do you have any final thoughts for career development practitioners and researchers?

**Donald:** The work that you do is important and meaningful for the future of this country and our economic well-being. For that, I salute and thank you for your efforts.

**CJCD:** Thank you Donald for letting us hear about your history, words of wisdom, and life lessons. We sincerely appreciate your contributions to the career development field.