

Harvey McKinnon

Man with multiple talents

He is sharp as a whip, funny to the bone, nice to a fault, quick on his feet and can dance up a storm. He's also an author, environmentalist, altruist, direct marketer, fundraiser and teacher.

My son made an observation recently about my articles: "Dad, do you know that you write more about people in the non-profit side of the business than you do about any other industry?"

On reflection, I realized he was right and considered the reasons why. People who work for non-profits are generally more interesting to start with, and are really nice to deal with. They have a lot of integrity and are quite passionate about their work and the causes they are helping.

Besides, they are very courteous people and I like that.

One such person is Harvey McKinnon. He runs his own not-for-profit agency out of Vancouver called Harvey McKinnon Associates.

First book was pure gold

Harvey's first book was called *Hidden Gold*. It was about monthly giving and explained how one could build donor loyalty, boost an organization's income and increase financial stability. He wrote about the importance of monthly giving five years before it became trendy. He is a strong advocate of this type of donation and has helped many organizations boost their monthly giving programs.

"Significant growth is possible," he says. "The David Suzuki Foundation had a small number of monthly donors a few years ago, now they have more than 7,500 just from direct mail initiatives."

"The key factor is that monthly donors are eight to 20 times more valuable in the long term. So even if only 10 percent of the donors contribute monthly, that can represent as much income as the other 90 percent of contributors over their lifetime of giving."

Second book shows his heart of gold

Harvey is currently coauthoring his second book called *The Power of Giving* with Azim Jamal, the motivational speaker, who wrote *Seven Steps to Lasting Happiness*.

The Power of Giving is a book about the many ways to give, including time, money, volunteerism and kindness. The book also includes a section on teaching children how to give.

Later this year the book will be posted online and people will be able to download it free of charge at www.powerofgiving.org. And the profits from the printed edition will be donated to charities.

Why are Harvey and Azim giving the book away? It's partly because they have been friends for so long and have always wanted to do something together. It's also because both believe that the true power of giving also means donating one's knowledge freely.

Another instance that came up in our conversation was about a mutual friend Michael Johnson of HJC New Media. Harvey mentioned that last year Michael won the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) account. My ears perked up and I listened very intently because I had created this piece for HJC and the response was the highest globally.

However, a junior staff member at HJC had made a big mistake. It cost Michael a lot of money because he had graciously rectified the situation by reimbursing the client.

"That was a great gesture from Michael and few would have done it," observes Harvey. "Yet in spite of that, UNHCR wanted to pull the account from HJC and approached us. I wrote a letter to UNHCR saying that Michael does great work and even if the junior person made a mistake he has compensated you well, so please continue to work with him. When they wouldn't give it to him, to show my support I withdrew from the competition."

To me this gesture was truly gracious. Few people in any other industry would do that.

Another fascinating fact about Harvey is his multi-dimensional career. When he started his direct marketing agency, he also set up a TV documentary company.

"Back then I was worried that I might get into a situation that if I ever got bored with direct mail, then I could focus on TV," he rationalizes. "But as it turns out, I still love direct mail as much as I did 26 years ago."

His connection to the film business goes

back to the early days of the TV series CODCO – before the group produced the hit comedy *This hour has 22 minutes*. Harvey loves comedy; and he was hired as CODCO's story editor for one season.

"The show won a Gemini that year for best comedy series," he confesses proudly.

Turns down Michael Moore

Harvey was even offered the producer's job on Michael Moore's TV series *The awful truth* for many reasons.

"My interest in social and political issues, my background in satire, my documentary production background, in many ways it was the perfect job for me – except for the fact that I had a young child at the time," he explains. "The job meant a lot of travelling so I declined the offer."

His hobby is collecting joke books and he claims that he knows approximately 20,000 jokes. He has also been a board member of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival for 10 years.

Another passion of his is dancing. Rhythm is in his "sole" and he even used to break dance in university. He loves a wide range of music, from rock to folk to blues.

When he was in Mozambique (while working with Oxfam), the staff took him to a disco club. The music was so hot and heavy; Harvey got on the dance floor and received a standing ovation from all the local people. He even claims that his wife fell in love with him when she saw him dance.

His Oxfam Canada decade

Harvey started his career in direct marketing working as Oxfam Canada's regional coordinator, and soon found that he loved direct marketing. In fact, he loved it so much that he didn't quite finish his master's thesis in sociology.

He helped raise close to \$1 million in one month for the emergency war crisis in Nicaragua. In 1984 during the Ethiopian crisis, he helped raise \$5 million in six weeks, a huge portion of it through direct response.

Harvey observed, "There is something special about writing copy for a letter, mailing it to thousands of people and having them send you donations for nothing other than wanting to make the world a better place."

After a decade at Oxfam, he finally left. His mother had just died after a long bout with cancer and he had spent 10 years working incredibly long hours for a cause that he was passionate about and good at. But he felt burned out.

"I took six months off, both to regain my energy and to sort out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Then I launched my own direct marketing agency."

He practices what he preaches

He bikes for environmental reasons.

"Our family is committed to having only one vehicle. It's also an easy way to get exercise," he laughs. "I live about 10 kilometres from my office and Vancouver is quite hilly, so I get a decent workout going both ways. Even my older son James, who is nine, occasionally cycles 15 kilometres to school."

Harvey McKinnon Associates has often worked pro bono for many clients whose missions and values it believes in. It uses only low energy light bulbs and purchases only organic coffee and sugar for the office. It reuses and recycles containers, paper and cardboard.

For three years in a row, the company has tied for first place in Better Environmentally Sound Transportation's Commuter Challenge, with a perfect 100 percent participation rate. Employees share 20 percent of company profits in an egalitarian way (not based on hierarchy) and they collectively select charities to which they donate five percent of the company profits at year end.

Harvey's first book established him as an expert in monthly giving and this has led to speaking engagements all over the world. He's helped train organizations in Australia, Europe, the U.S. and even South Africa to develop highly lucrative fundraising pledge programs.

"The most important aspect of direct mail in the future will still be communicating a mes-



Direct & personal

with Billy Sharma

President and creative director of Designers Inc., Toronto.

Harvey McKinnon runs his namesake not-for-profit agency out of Vancouver. His first book, *Hidden Gold*, explored the subject of monthly giving and its importance, five years before it became trendy.

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"I only hire people who can laugh at my jokes," —McKinnon



sage to prospects, donors and customers that motivates them to respond. I also believe we will see more integration between the various media and each year, the Internet will increase in importance."

He attributes his accomplishments to a number of people who have influenced him. At the top of the list is his father, who taught him integrity. Another inspirer was Con Squires, who is one of the gurus of direct mail in America and who acted not only as a consultant and mentor, but also as a good friend.

When I asked Harvey if there was anything else he would have rather done, he explains: "If I could do it again, I wouldn't change anything because altering any part may have changed my career trajectory or personal relationships – both of which I'm delighted with."

His talent for alchemy

Harvey has managed to navigate a varied and successful career and now that he has wrapped up his documentary business, he intends to concentrate on his core fundraising business. He's a bit of an alchemist in the way he puts people, ideas, art and charity together. In many ways he personifies today's buzzword, integration.

"We are in a high growth period, but we hire very slowly because the last time I fired someone, I couldn't sleep for nights, and I never want to do that again. We now go through a process where, as a team, we interview a large number of people and ask them to write a one page essay on smoking."

"We pick this topic because it allows the candidates to write about an important health issue, offers them the ability to express personal convictions and demonstrates how well they write. Those who refuse to write tell us that they are not very interested."

"A high priority in interviews is to determine a candidate's sense of humour, because I only hire people who can also laugh at my jokes," he chuckles. ■

Billy Sharma, president & creative director, Designers Inc., Toronto can be reached at 416.203.9787

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