

Hon. David R. Peterson

"Treat the world as if there are no barriers, go after your passion, work very hard, the possibilities are endless."

On February 14, TMG Principal Lisa Mattam met with the Honorable David R. Peterson, former Premier of Ontario. With a long history of leadership roles in politics, in corporate life and in academia, Mr. Peterson has faced leadership challenges that few leaders have and he has risen to every challenge. He is a consummate professional, a brilliant and passionate thinker and a gracious mentor. Interviewing him was a great honour.

LM: How would you describe **your leadership style**?

DP: My style is a very **consultative** one. Every leader needs to have core values (and) without those values you cannot successfully lead. When you have those core values to guide you, you also need to consult with people widely, encourage people to disagree with you, and encourage active dialogue. Try to get the very best advice you can. That is how you make the hard decisions. Then, I delegate. I surround myself with the right people and then I trust them by delegating decisions to them

LM: Given all of the different positions that you have held throughout your career how **has your leadership style changed?** Or has it?

DP: My style has not necessarily changed at all but what is important is to make sure that you are not recycling your material or your ideas. You need to engage in new things all the time. You don't need to fundamentally change how you operate but **find yourself in opportunities that keep you fresh and learning.**

LM: Thinking back specifically to the time of the Meech Lake Accord, in many ways you were a visionary and now looking back I believe you had the right vision to unify the country but at the time the people of Ontario did not share that vision. **How do you as a leader follow the vision that you know and believe is right for your people when they do not yet believe?** How do you convince them to join your mission? How do you get support?

DP: This is the single most difficult thing to do. I tried to persuade them. I had been deeply steeped in Quebec politics, I studied in Quebec, I talked to a number of people across the country and I believed passionately that this was the right move for the country. You try to persuade, you try to convince that it is in the national interest of the country, you do your best. I took a strong stand, and I believed in it. As a leader, you can not just go to the lowest common denominator- you have to lead. That is your role. **When you think of what defines great leadership, you have to decide what are you willing to go to the wall for? What are you willing to die for?** It is a classic challenge of leadership. People have varying degrees of success but you have to go back to your core values. A leader must decide at some point if they will stand up for what they truly believe to be the right direction. That is what I chose to do.

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LM: As a Canadian society we value diversity, and we see that there is a changing face to many organizations, **how do we instill a culture where we use this diversity as a point of competitive advantage and differentiation?**

DP: There is no country in the history of the world that has handled diversity better. This country has developed by evolution. The belief in diversity is a common value in this country. The majority of Canadians believe in and will fight for the values of diversity. We are not perfect but we have a solid foundation to build on. Organizations are becoming meritocracies more than ever before and they need to. As Chancellor of the University of Toronto, I see at Convocation the changing face of the new graduates. I love it and it is that changing face that will keep this country thriving. Times change and companies change, every leader has to make a commitment to diversity to reflect this change. It must be reflected in everything that they do. **Diversity is our single biggest strength as a country.**

LM: What advice would you give to young corporate executives looking to accelerate their careers and solidify their leadership ability?

DP: Educate yourself, treat the world as if there are no barriers, follow your passion in life. Recognize that we are in a meritocracy. Work very hard and know that you can do anything.

Mr. Peterson was called to the bar in 1969. Despite his legal background, most of Peterson's early career was spent in the world of private enterprise. He became president of C.M. Peterson Company Limited, a wholesale electronics firm founded by his father, at age twenty-six, and joined the Chamber of Commerce's Young Presidents Club in the same period. He then moved onto the pursuit of his political career after 10 years as an MP and later the Head of the Ontario Liberal Party on June 18, 1985 Peterson was sworn in as Premier of Ontario. Both Peterson and his government remained popular throughout his tenure. Mr. Peterson's government was credited with many wins for the Ontario People and is often remembered for his strong advocacy of the then controversial Meech Lake Accord. Mr. Peterson continues to play a large role in the Liberal Party.

In addition, David Peterson was the founding chairman of the Toronto Raptors of the National Basketball Association, and was a member of Toronto's Olympics Bid Committee. Since leaving politics, he has been a professor at York University in Toronto, a senior partner and chairman of the Toronto law firm Cassels, Brock & Blackwell, and has been director or member of several charitable, cultural, and environmental organizations. Peterson became chancellor of the University of Toronto effective July 1, 2006. The appointment is a three-year term.

David Peterson was given an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the University of Western Ontario on June 15, 2006. Mr. Peterson is married with three children.