



By Don Hill

# Got the GOVERNMENT you deserve...yet?

A friend of mine put it well when he said, "Life on the planet seems to be just one damn thing after the other." It is a sentiment I am sure you have expressed too. I, for one, would prefer to think that there is a way past all the problems of the world.

There is. It is called the 'design way', a remarkably simple idea: What would happen if leaders set aside their role as troubleshooters and behaved more like designers?

"Design is a big deal," Harold Nelson said during a conference session I attended at the Banff Centre for Leadership Development. Dr. Nelson is emeritus at Stanford University, and is president of the Advanced Design Institute in Seattle. Given all our technological innovation, he surprisingly declared that "Western culture is not very adept at using design to achieve greater purpose."

During his tenure at Stanford, Dr. Nelson studied and described how managers and leaders from every walk of life tended to frame their perceptions of the world in a problem setting. They had good reason to do so, he said, because communities and customers are usually quick on the draw "to say what they don't like and what they don't want," but almost always have "a difficult time actually stating what they desire."

In a seminal book *The Design Way*, Dr. Nelson outlined the circumstances that generally guide leadership to make decisions in the United States, situations that are equally true of politics here in Alberta. "My students monitored the media to see how many times action was taken by either government or business in response to a problem," and how many times change was initiated because of something that was desirable. "Very, very few times," less than one per cent according to the study, "is significant action taken out of a sense of desire." What would happen, Dr. Nelson mused, if government and leaders "acted as designers and they were serving clients?"

The service model tends to work well when there is a contractual relationship

between equals and there is a genuine exchange of value. "The designer tries to bring into existence what they hear the client saying they desire," Dr. Nelson explained. What's more, "they help the client understand what is desired."

So what would happen if governments and leaders contracted with us, striking a bargain as one might between designers and their clients? Dr. Nelson feels certain this would create the conditions to "bring something into existence that we desired," with the understanding that the relationship is an ongoing deal, subject to change and never, ever should be taken for granted.

## THE VISION THING

"Ordinary leaders take people where they want to go," said Ken Low, director of the Action Studies Institute of Calgary. "Great leaders take people where they ought to go." However, there is a real and present danger for leaders who get so far out and ahead of the crowd; they can get mistaken for the enemy.

To my way of thinking, the provincial election campaign of late is a concrete example of the leadership that comes bundled with "the politics of problems" articulated by Dr. Nelson. Not one of the party leaders outlined a vision for Alberta beyond dealing with long-standing complaints and being compliant to the immediate woes brought to their attention.

Over a year ago now, a newspaper article by Preston Manning brought home the idea of a new design for what otherwise could be considered 'politics as usual' in the land.

"We have a bad habit in Canada of looking to our political leaders to solve challenges for us," Manning wrote in the *Calgary Herald*. "We forget that they are

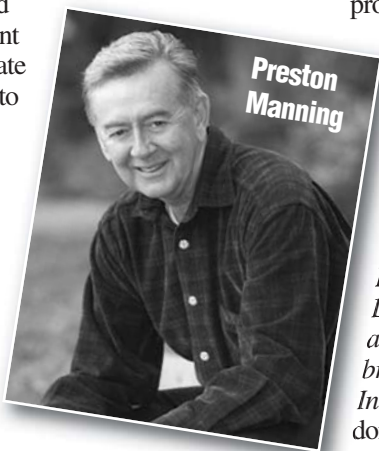
not our political masters; they are there to represent and serve us."

Manning, as former Leader of the Opposition in Ottawa and the son of a long-serving premier of our province, made the excellent point that we—you and I—have a responsibility to make it clear to politicians what we *desire*, as Dr. Nelson might put it, rather than what we object to (especially now that the so-called runaway train of development and its impact on the environment is of concern to a majority of Albertans).

I have written about this before, but the story merits a repeat.

A couple of years back, I had Manning on my province-wide radio phone in show. I was intrigued by his response to a question about the environment, following an otherwise unremarkable speech he made in Red Deer. "I don't think Albertans are getting the governance that they deserve," he said. And when I prompted him to further explain (because he did leave things hanging a bit), he volunteered that, in his opinion and given the history of rapid-fire political movements in the West, the environment might well be the rallying point for a new style of governance and a new political party "that has yet to reveal its name." Manning also hinted that whatever the party called itself, there was a very good probability 'it' would be the next political dynasty in the province.

We have a new government in Alberta this month. Is this the governance you genuinely *desire* or the type of administration—no matter what political flavour you favour—that you have simply learned to live with? ✓



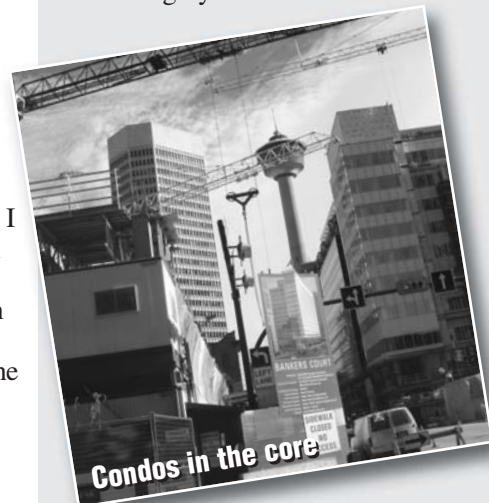
Preston Manning

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## Edmontonian IN EXILE

By Janet Edmondson in Calgary

Downtown Calgary, like Edmonton, is in condominium overdrive. Given that it has Canada's second highest concentration of corporate head offices, about 12 percent of the population works downtown. The city is 722 square kilometres in area, so many people drive two hours or more to get to a downtown office, and then pay exorbitant prices to park nearby. As a result, there is a galloping desire to live in the Calgary core.



Savvy condo developers figured out years ago that "if you build them, they will come." In addition to the scores of high-rise buildings finished and fully occupied downtown, there are currently 850 condo units being built, and 1700 more are proposed or approved for construction. You can add to those almost 15,000 units proposed, approved or under construction in the 'Beltline' high density area directly south of downtown. That's a billion dollars worth of construction. The Calgary skyline has more cranes than an origami convention.

Right now, there are two major grocery stores in the Beltline—Safeway and Co-op—three blocks apart. Downtown has nothing but 7-Elevens, Mac's and the prophetically named B&E Grocery. This means that all those people who are moving to be closer to downtown are getting back into their cars and driving out of the core to buy groceries. Likewise with other necessities.

Sears was the only place you could buy a hammer or a power tool downtown, but its Eaton Centre store closed shortly after Christmas. I don't think the new tenant—Holt Renfrew—is going to fill the hardware niche. The city centre has but three movie theatres... no pet food stores... and most retail outlets in the downtown core are only open for late night shopping on Thursdays and Fridays. Don't sell that car quite yet.

Edmonton is in the same predicament. SaveOnFoods is on 109th Street and Sobeys is under construction on 104th—a few blocks apart. And, convenience stores are pretty much non-existent in the core. Need a screwdriver?... not even at The Hardware Grill. Urban Edmontonians are frustrated by the same limited shopping as their Calgary cousins.

Both of our cities need to have accessible retail facilities to keep pace with their explosive city centre developments. Downtown dwellers are crying out for a closer grocer. ✓



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