

# What exactly is leadership?



By Don Hill



Preston Manning



Eric Newell



Michael Percy



Henry Mintzberg

It's a question put to over 50 leaders in a series of conversations for a new *CKUA Radio Network* series about leading in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

"I heard it described on the weekend," said Terry Wickham, the producer of the Edmonton Folk Music Festival, "as walking behind the herd of sheep. People don't even know it, but that is what's guiding them."

Elizabeth May, with a nod to tradition, tells a great yarn about leadership.

"Those are my people and I'm their leader," the new federal leader of the Green Party said. "So I must catch up with them."

There's another story going around, no doubt you've heard it. What's happened to the leadership in our country? Where are all the leaders? Well... where are they?

Look around: That's right—you are the leader. The leader is you.

Preston Manning put it well after the opening of the *Manning Centre for Building Democracy* when he declared that Albertans are in a unique position to demonstrate leadership in the country.

We have "complained about not having influence in Confederation for a long time," Manning said. "But now the province has tremendous financial and political assets. The question is: How are you going to use it?"

Before we start telling the rest of the country what to do, we better closely examine what is going on in our own backyard in Edmonton, and especially in our neighbourhoods.

What sets Edmonton apart from the other major metropolitan city in the province is self-evident to anyone who lives here. We enjoy a vibrant culture—world-class by some accounts—and are noted for our strong sense of community. It is no accident of growth. Over the decades, myriad dedicated people built our neighbourhoods with care and attention, and a vision that binds our city together to this day.

The past 18 months, however, have put extraordinary pressure on the distinctive communities we enjoy within our city. The explosion of economic growth—likely to be

sustained much longer than the last boom—has come at a price. Edmonton is changing very, very rapidly... to the point where nobody seems to be in charge long enough to chart a direction for the kind of community we have had in mind. Let alone want to plan for.

"Leaders have to be able to develop a shared vision," Eric Newell said in his pleasantly appointed office, surrounded by reminders of the city's past. Now chancellor of the University of Alberta, the former CEO of Syncread was once in a key economic driver's seat, steering the province through a major boom and a bust. Newell knows that a carefully expressed vision "engages people... motivates people to be better than something they currently are."

The *Alberta Advantage* has worked too well. We're swamped with development. Perhaps it's time for another "shared vision" for our city and the province—not so much about what we don't want, but rather what we can design for ourselves.

Harold Nelson is the founder of the Advance Design Institute, an international organization based in Seattle. He's also the co-author of *The Design Way*, a book that challenges the basic assumption that leadership and leading are mostly about problem solving.

"Design is a big deal," Nelson said, pointing out that most leaders think their primary job is to resolve troublesome issues brought to their attention. The real problem, he argues, is that leaders create the conditions to only discuss problems. "People have a difficult time actually stating what they desire. And it's very easy for them to say what they don't like, what they don't want."

What would happen if opinion polls, for instance, were framed with questions about what we want in Edmonton—what we *desire* as Nelson put it—rather than what we object to?

It is certain true leaders need to engage us with a dynamic sense of themselves. But "charismatic leadership is vastly overrated and fundamentally destructive," warned Michael Percy, the Dean of the School of Business at the University of Alberta.

A public policy economist by training, Percy is a veteran of provincial politics. He's also been inside the minds of leaders at the federal level—politicians who have left their mark on the country. While a populist leader with a smart sense of what works at street level can captivate headlines with sheer charisma, Percy points out that in the long run, "very little will survive, in terms of successors and independent action behind the charismatic leader."

Henry Mintzberg, the Cleghorn Chair of Management Studies at McGill University in Montreal agrees. Recognized worldwide as one of the leading commentators on management, and with many highly-regarded books on the subject to his credit, he admittedly is weary about the hype around leadership.

"It's not this great one riding in on the white horse," Mintzberg said during a hasty meal between sessions counselling a visitor, an advisor to the Bush Administration, and later, a roomful of high-profile business leaders.

"Despite all this hype about leadership, we're not getting it. And maybe we're looking in the wrong place. Maybe we should be looking for *community-ship*... looking for people who will take things in their own hands, and take care of it."

Community-ship challenges each and every Edmontonian to take responsibility as leaders.

Leadership comes in many flavours. Whether you're managing in the middle, running a small business or a large multinational—perhaps you're a volunteer at the local community league or a coach—I will be talking about contemporary leadership, best practices, and leading in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on *Inspiring Leadership*, a series of radio documentaries beginning January 20th at 8 AM on the *CKUA Radio Network*. ✓

Don Hill, pictured above left, is a 'thought leader' with *Leadership Development at the Banff Centre*. He is also a award-winning writer and broadcaster with a large footprint on the internet. For more details visit: <http://ckua.com> or <http://appropriate-entertainment.com>

## The Stelmach Factor

By Barb Deters

Ed Stelmach landed one of the most important positions in Alberta. The interview process was long and arduous. That Steady Eddie even made it to the shortlist surprised many... that he got the nod from the majority of people on the selection committee shocked the perceived favourites and stunned the media.

As premier, Stelmach is the new president of Executive Council which essentially comprises the senior management team—his vice-presidents—of the equivalent of the biggest business in the province. And make no mistake about it, government *is* big business.

Stelmach vaulted into the seat of power amid much debate, heated discussion and hand-wringing angst. His every move is analyzed and dissected. His cabinet minister appointments have generated outrage and concern. The pundits worry that previously unknown backbenchers lack the wherewithal to run this province as it should be... to understand the complexities of big cities... to manage economic growth and unprecedented revenues.

Stelmach didn't really have a transition plan developed before he moved into the east wing of the Legislature Building. Yet, to his credit, he has reorganized the power structure and downsized government ministries as he sees fit. He has made some surprise appointments. And he has set the priorities for each government department. He has challenged his caucus to get on board a new band wagon.

What kind of a leader will Ed Stelmach be? Honestly, only time will tell. What is clear is that Ed Stelmach is his own man. ✓



Premier Ed Stelmach

Government of Alberta Photo