



THE 1992 CANADIAN ASTRONAUT RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN *Our Most Exciting Search*

The grade 4 class from the Hampton School in Victoria, BC applied; 27 high school teachers applied; a Toronto rock band applied; a heart specialist applied by sending a video of the artificial heart he was developing; an Engineer from Calgary applied by making a scale model of the Space Shuttle and enclosing his CV in the cargo bay. In total, over 5,300 Canadians applied. They were all applying for one of four positions within the Canadian Space Agency as Astronaut, one of the most fascinating careers available.



The recruitment and selection of Astronauts also presents one of the most interesting challenges ever presented to a recruiter.

The Recruiters' Mandate

Alan Davis' firm was picked by the Canadian Space Agency in November of 1991 to assist them in the design and implementation of a recruitment advertising campaign for Engineers and Scientists, four of whom would join the Canadian Astronauts Corps. This followed a nation-wide competition in which 43 search and selection firms were invited to bid. Only two of these firms, Alan's and one other, met the standards required by the Agency. Essentially, Alan's role was to design and "program manage" the whole campaign and present recommendations to the Canadian Space Agency at each screening level, so that the Selection Committee could make screening decisions, based on realistic selection parameters and fair and equitable assessment methods.

The Right Stuff

The first challenge was to define the requirements in such a way that all applicants could be measured against the same selection parameters. In addition to measuring the level and relevance of education and experience, Alan's team also had to measure personality traits such as stress tolerance, the ability to work in isolated environments in close contact with others and the ability to resolve conflict. Also, of course, were the strict medical standards set down by the International partners of the Space Station "Freedom".

Pre-Selection

As the CV's arrived, they were inserted into a fast, efficient, initial screening process during which all facets of experience and education were scored against predefined parameters and the scores immediately entered, by discipline, of the best qualified applications.

Paper Selection

Over 500 CV's were presented to the Canadian Space Agency's Selection Committee for an initial review. Of these, 370 were selected for further consideration. These applicants were sent an assessment package which included an application form and a medical questionnaire (both of which had been specially designed for the selection process), a psychological questionnaire and three security forms. Once these packages had been returned, they were each assessed by the relevant specialists and just over 100 were selected for interviews.

Initial Interview

The initial interviews gave the Recruiters an introduction to the personalities of the top applicants and at the same time allowed the applicants to learn what becoming an Astronaut really meant. Concurrent with the first screening interview, the applicants were required to sit a batch of psychological tests and interviews to further assess their suitability. These interviews took place across Canada, and Alan's group presented their findings to the Selection Committee who had the difficult task of selecting the top 50. The objective and equal treatment of each applicant made the job a lot easier.

Panel Interview

The next hurdle to be overcome by the applicants was a seven-person panel interview. These interviews took place in Montreal, Toronto and Calgary and because of the level of interest shown in the campaign by the media, each was preceded by a press conference. To make it even more interesting for the applicants, a documentary film crew was present during the panel interviews, so they got a quick taste of how you lose your privacy if you want to be an Astronaut. The documentary film called "Space for Four" has been screened several times on the CBC, and other networks.

During the two week period that these interviews were taking place, the applicants were required to take a flight medical at their local Canadian Forces Base, the results of which were fed into the overall screening process.

Again, at the end of the phase, Alan's team was able to provide clear and objective recommendations to the Canadian Space Agency Selection Committee.

Final Selection

The top twenty “finalists” were invited to Ottawa for the last week in May to undergo further evaluation and scrutiny. This included a minimum of twenty hours of medical examinations at the National Defence Medical Centre, another panel interview, manual dexterity testing, oral presentations, psychiatric examinations and visits to space-related facilities in Ottawa. The main hurdle facing the selection team during this final phase was the coordination of all these activities and a very detailed program was devised. All the interviews, tests and activities took place as scheduled and all the applicants managed to appear at the right place at the right time, with the right material. This did not, however, make the task of selecting four out of the twenty any easier, although again, a scoring system had been put in place to ensure conformity and to assist in decision making. The final selections were made at a meeting in Ottawa on June 4th, and the announcement made a week later.

During the final week of evaluation, the applicants quickly became a very tightly-knit group, all of whom could see that they were competing against very stiff competition. They all felt that it was one of the most positive and memorable events of their lives. A testament to their creativity was that in only four days they had designed and procured commemorative T-shirts, displaying the C.S.A. logo on the front and a signed group photograph on the back!



To Alan Davis, just wanted to say thanks for the selection. Best of luck always, Chris Hadfield



*Per aspera ad astra
signed, Julie Payette*



signed: Dave Williams

Not Your Regular Recruitment Campaign

An Astronaut recruitment and selection program provides some unique challenges to the recruiter. First it is in the public sector, hence the need for obvious fairness and an audit trail behind every decision. Coupled with this is the fact that it is of great interest to the general public and to the media. There are no existing Astronauts to recruit (except the ones who already work for the Space Agency) so you recruit from first principles. It automatically represents a significant career change for every applicant. Also, the level of interest from the applicants was

such that Alan's team was required to install and man telephone hotlines to keep all the respondents aware of where their applications stood.

The Recruiters' Dream

When it was all over, one of the main sources of satisfaction for Alan Davis' was not the thanks from the fortunate four and from a satisfied client, although these were appreciated. The ultimate endorsement of a fair and equitable process came from those who didn't make it - from dozens of would-be astronauts who, although disappointed, felt they had been evenly and fairly treated throughout the process.

In many ways, the experience was a recruiter's dream because of having a huge pool of highly-qualified candidates. For Alan Davis and his team, the success of the Campaign has become a source of great pride. The Consultants who were involved at the various interview stages still talk about the privilege of having met Canada's best, from such a wide variety of fascinating disciplines.

Today's Reality



Chris Hadfield, Julie Payette, Alan Davis & Dave Williams

All three finalist candidates, Chris Hadfield, Dave Williams, and Julie Payette, have already flown successfully in Space.

All of them have become household names in Canada. They have, in fact, made the recruiters look very good!

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The Author:

Alan Davis is a 22-year veteran in the recruiting and selection arena and has managed many recruiting campaigns, both in Canada and overseas. He was the architect of the 1992 Canadian Astronaut Recruitment Campaign. His company provides specialized services in recruitment, selection, and interview training.