

Speech given by Dr. Marc Garneau at the 25th anniversary party of Alan Davis & Associates Inc. on February 7, 2008 at the Chateau Ramezay in Montreal

Dear friends

First of all, it's a pleasure to be invited here with you today to celebrate 25 years of great success achieved by Alan Davis and Associates in the recruiting business. One of those successes is of course near and dear to me because I was involved personally.

I met Alan in late 1991 at the time of the second Canadian astronaut selection, his company having been chosen to undertake the very complex task of finding the best astronaut candidates in Canada.

I guess I should say the next best candidates in Canada since the six best (which included me) were chosen 8 years earlier in 1983.

This was a very complex undertaking given the fact that over 5000 Canadians applied for the job. Fortunately for us, we had given the task to the right team and today, more than 15 years later, Alan can proudly point to the great successes achieved by Chris Hadfield, Julie Payette and Dave Williams, all of whom achieved a number of firsts for Canada and made us the 4th most flown astronaut corps in the world.

It's great that some of the key people from the Canadian Space program who were involved in that selection process are here with us this evening: notably Bruce Aikenhead who was the Director of the Canadian Astronaut program at the time and Arline Marchand who headed up Human Resources.

I also had the pleasure to be involved during the selection process and given the fact that it was a fairly lengthy process got the chance to get to know Alan very well and we have been close friends ever since. I have also had the pleasure of getting to know Diane much better as well, all of us having exposed ourselves to the humiliation of playing golf together. So we really do know each other and how badly we can slice, hook or otherwise totally miss the ball.

The theme of this gathering is a very appropriate one, "Enduring Relationships".

To quote Alan, referring to his team: "This has been the cornerstone of our success and, I believe, the cornerstone of many business success stories. A number of people in the room will have been Clients for all 25 years that we have been in business. Others would have been, had they been born earlier."

That's quite a testimony to the success of the approach adopted by Alan and his colleagues. Not many companies in the recruiting business can make such a claim.

Recruiting the right candidate, whether it's an astronaut or another professional is a crucial step in the life of any organisation. We all know the difference between getting the right and the wrong candidate, hence the great importance of choosing the right company to manage the process.

The recruiting function is always the start of a relationship between a candidate and his or her new boss. This underlines the importance of making the right selection, which if done well, will significantly increase the odds of a successful relationship.

Recruiting is about much more than simply picking people with the right professional or academic qualifications. It's also about gauging whether the candidate and the employer make a good fit. It's about their relationship and that involves an understanding of the personalities involved.

In the case of the Canadian astronaut selection process, there were many candidates with impressive academic and professional credentials and excellent health but beyond that, the real challenge was to identify those that had the right personality traits to become good astronauts. I'm talking about interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate effectively one-on-one or to a very large audience, a willingness to work as a team member and to compromise while remaining principled, someone who has broad interests rather than only narrowly focused ones. I'm sure you'll agree that it takes skill and experience and perhaps even a certain intuition to recognize those personality traits in someone, sometimes based on nothing more than a career résumé. I think Alan and his team possess those skills and that experience.

Similarly, from Alan's perspective, the relationship that he establishes with his Clients (i.e. the employing companies) is also of critical importance. If he builds a trusting relationship with them and delivers the right candidates, he can earn the right to win their future business. That will depend of course on their satisfaction with the people he has helped them hire. By all accounts, Alan Davis and Associates has achieved a high degree of success.

Thinking back to that astronaut selection process, I can remember just how badly some Canadians wanted to become astronauts. Out of over 5000 applicants, we shouldn't be surprised to hear that one or two applicants were technically grandparents but obviously grandparents who had retained their sense of wonder, of passion and of curiosity. They really wanted to fly. If enthusiasm counted for anything, they certainly would have achieved high scores. And then there was the very attractive young lady who sent us her pin-up photo, perhaps assuming this might increase her odds.

Most of the time however, we were faced with the difficult decision of how best to identify the best qualified candidates in a very crowded field, a process that, not

surprisingly became more difficult as the field narrowed. Fortunately, Alan and his team knew what they were doing and we were able to optimize the process of zeroing in on the best candidates.

Given the major changes that we are undergoing in Canada and throughout the world, how is the whole business of recruiting changing? When I speak of major changes, I'm referring to aging demographics as well as to the arrival of an increasing number of skilled immigrants. The pool of talent for hire is gradually changing and may require a new approach to recruiting. There may also be new expectations from recruits before they are willing to join an enterprise.

To quote Alan: "Looking ahead to how recruiting is likely to evolve over the next couple of decades, I predict that we will witness a sea change in the attitude of employers. They are going to have to react to new generations of candidates who will be bringing an entirely different set of expectations to their future employers. Also, given the demographics (or should I say Dooms Day scenarios), employers will have to start building relationships with their future hires in good time, in order to get their share of good prospects."

I haven't asked Alan or his Associates about their plans for the next 25 years but it strikes me that the solid reputation they have built over the past 25 years is an impressive foundation upon which to build.

Congratulations to you Alan and to your team. You deserve to celebrate this evening. Good luck for the future.