



Leader of the iPod nation

In conversation with Dr. Robert Campbell

He's up at 5:30 a.m. each day for a morning jog, his workouts fuelled by Radiohead, or some other of the estimated 15,000 songs on his iPod. He powers through up to 40 novels a year – and three times as many new rock records. He and his wife, the Governor General Award-winning academic Dr. Christl Verduyn, have four grown children, and in the years they weren't teaching or parenting, managed to publish 20 books and countless journal articles between them. A study in discipline and energy, Dr. Robert Campbell began his second term as president of one of Canada's most prestigious institutions – Mount Allison University – in 2011.

It pays to drive a hard bargain.

In my early thirties, I was invited to be the chair of Trent University's political science department. I said, 'Look, if I'm going to do this, I don't want a one-year appointment or a two-year appointment, I want a five-year appointment, so I can figure out if I actually like doing this.' To my surprise, they gave it to me, and two years in we went from a troubled department to the one everybody in the university was looking to. The experience taught me an important lesson about leadership: that one person can make a difference.

I'm a believer in the power of drudge work. When it comes to identifying emerging leaders, I'm always

looking for the people who have started at the bottom and worked their way up. I want people who have had the nitty-gritty experiences that help them find the best place to access money, create a collegiate atmosphere, build up consensus and help the organization rock and roll effectively.

There are four shifts in every day. My wife and I made the conscious decision to have four children, and to have fulfilling careers as academics. What it meant for us was that of the 24 hours in the day, we spent 18 of them parenting and working. It was a challenging balance to finesse, but the experience bred the sort of committed discipline that a modern leader requires. And I think our model helped our

children understand the importance of higher training as a competence, and also the power of finding something you love and working at it.

The worst thing a leader can be told is 'You don't understand.'

That's why I have never given up teaching or research. It's pretty hard to be a leader in a university, to talk about the value of research, if you're not doing that yourself. My board understands that I need to show credibility in the research and professional communities because it sends a signal to the world that Mount Allison University takes these matters seriously.

The role of a university president is more complex today than it ever has been.

Today we need presidents who have broad-based skill sets to deal with a range of challenges – rising costs, accountability expectations from government, unions, recruitment, marketing, students issues, and programming. To do it well, you have to genuinely love and believe in the institution.

The biggest challenge for Atlantic Canada over the next 50 years is the people challenge.

We're not the centre of the universe; we lack some of the natural advantages of other places. But Atlantic Canada's success over the next number of generations will be the result of the wit of its people – our ability to attract people here, retain them, train them really, really well and give them opportunities. I see the university as the centre of that particular universe of opportunity over the next 10 or 20 years.

The most important thing a leader can be is useful.

Sometimes your work can be lonely or isolating, but you have to tell yourself not to give up, and that you're going to work hard to be very, very useful. But other times, your usefulness may have run its course, and you need to step away and uncover another opportunity to serve. | **ABM**

Interviewed by Anna Stuart, vice-president, Knightsbridge Robertson Surette – Atlantic Canada's leading recruitment and human resource consulting firm. Leader's Insight conversations are published in each issue of Atlantic Business Magazine. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com