



STRATEGIES FOR LEADERSHIP

Meet an RBC employee whose unique perspective on leadership is putting him at the head of the pack

BY LISA MACHADO

If anyone had told Andrew McConnell 10 years ago that he'd hold executive responsibilities in the financial services industry, he would have laughed out loud.

"At that point in my life, I had never considered a job in the financial services industry," says the 38-year-old. "Banking for many Aboriginal people was not considered a traditional career pursuit."

When McConnell was in his sixth season

as a professional football player -- a career that began with the National Football League's Cincinnati Bengals and continued with the Canadian Football League's Edmonton Eskimos -- a bank executive he met through one of the charities he supported urged McConnell to consider a career in financial services.

McConnell did more than just consider it. In 1993, he began a comprehensive executive development program and never looked back. Today, he is a regional vice-president,

Personal and Business Banking, RBC Financial Group, leading the Golden Horseshoe Region in Ontario. He was also profiled this past May in the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business* magazine as one of "Canada's Top 40 Leaders Under 40."

LIFE LESSONS

When asked to reveal the secrets behind his success, McConnell looks to formative life lessons, experiences and perspectives developed while walking and excelling with a foot in many worlds. Growing up in an Ojibway Community in Northern Ontario, he says he learned the importance of leading with courage, wisdom and honour.

"I believe that in many ways success is the result of the way you treat people. I work very hard with the people around me to challenge, empower and enable them to be as successful as they dare. For me, success in this regard is far more about developing others and watching them reach personal or professional goals. Even when you need to be tough or direct, as long as you treat people fairly and with respect, you can encourage their hearts."

COLLECTIVE POWER

This focus on people is part of McConnell's strategy and approach to leadership. "We must as leaders develop, understand and leverage a new language of partnership." McConnell not only believes in partnerships as a way to achieve business goals, but that solid alliances with partners and colleagues are keys to his own success.

His partnership model also revolves around valuing and leveraging people's differences.

"Celebrating and harvesting our rich diversity, whether it be cultural or experiential, must be leveraged as an important differentiator and key success factor as we evolve as a bank and employer of choice. This celebration and understanding of diversity not only will result in an enhanced ability to embrace and accelerate through change, but in many

ways will create a "return on inclusion" value proposition for RBC Royal Bank. None of us know what all of us know."

McConnell says his colleagues' generous spirit and commitment to customers and communities is in part what makes him proud to work at RBC, adding that he knows of no other corporation with the same level of volunteer participation or gifting to local communities.

"We do not only work in these communities," he says. "We also live and raise our families in them as well. Living our values is the right thing to do."

It is this community commitment that has helped RBC build a

loyal customer base. This, in addition to its commitment to deliver superior customer service, says McConnell, is one of RBC's fundamental competitive advantages and the reason customers continue to let it earn their business and trust.

"Our customer experience commitment must go well beyond just delivering the essentials of customer care. Where we differentiate ourselves is by making the client feel connected, valued and understood. We must commit to working with our customers so that they believe they have a banking partner that will help them identify not only needs and options, but will try to deliver customized value and advice-centric solutions."

As for McConnell's future, his aspirations know no limits. "I want to be as successful as I dare." ■



Andrew McConnell played pro football for seven seasons as a centre with the Cincinnati Bengals (NFL) and the Edmonton Eskimos (CFL) before beginning his financial career in 1993.