

# The unsung heroes of ethical leadership

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**Financial Post, National Post**  
**Wednesday July 8, 2009**

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Canada Day is a time when my family often gets together, and often as not talk turns to matters of country and politics. This year, when the topic of leaders in the news came up, I noted that not much has changed in the world in the 90 years since the culture critic H.L. Mencken said: "Democracy is the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage."

If you don't know much about Mencken, read Terry Teachout's *A Life of H.L. Mencken*. Mencken coined the term Bible Belt and in the 1920s and '30s, wrote blistering articles in the *Baltimore Sun* about the culture and mores of the denizens of the southern United States.

Were he writing today, Mencken would continue to have no shortage of subject matter to fill his column. For example, just last week, he could have written about Republicans who think it's OK for one of their senators to be unfaithful to his wife and keep his job, despite having called for a certain Democratic president's impeachment for a similar transgression. North of the border, Mencken would encounter an Albertan politician who thinks just because his comments are conveyed through a "social medium," the message doesn't matter.

When you read the headlines of the past few months, it might seem the world has no morals or ethics, and that money is the only thing that matters. But you know a funny thing happened. When I was searching for leaders to profile during the 2008/09 National Mentoring Series, a program I organize in my capacity as a philanthropy consultant, I called on mentors, students and friends to send me names of people that they think best define ethical leadership.

Briefly, ethical leadership emerged in the 1970s as an alternative to other leadership paradigms. The principles of ethical leadership are: respect, service, justice, honesty and community. Ethical leaders understand the value of human capital better than others, allowing them to motivate and capitalize on the creativity and ambition of those they serve. My question to the 50 people involved in this project was, "after hearing this definition, who is an ethical leader you would like to hear from?"

Among the names that came back from mentors and proteges were Mickey MacDonald, an entrepreneur from Halifax; David Onley, the lieutenant governor of Ontario; and Barack Obama. My friends recommended Christine Thomlinson of Rubin Thomlinson LLP in Toronto. The U.S. President for some reason was a little busy and could not take my call. As for Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Onley and Ms. Thomlinson, when I told them about the NMP, they said they would be happy to speak to the students, the mentors and the charities associated with the program.

Mr. MacDonald spoke in March at Dalhousie University in Halifax - a partner in the National Mentoring Program. Rather than talking about himself and his success, he spoke about his vision and the importance for business and entrepreneurs to give back to the community. His speech embodied an ethical leader by demonstrating the role that respect (for his parents and their hard work), service (how his mother was always volunteering), and justice (his less-than-affluent childhood) played in his life.

Mr. MacDonald is a handsome boxer and prosperous entrepreneur who founded Palooka's Boxing Club, a not-for-profit gym to reach out to troubled youth and to help them develop athletic and life skills. Palooka's is an impressive edifice that made even me interested in the sport. Young people who get involved in competitions and training, earn their way working around the gym. "No one gets a free ride," Mr. MacDonald said. That simple statement represents the very ethics new business practices need to build on in the coming years. Troubled youth aren't so far removed from troubled business men and women - they want the easy way to get rich, which often means taking from friends and clients: Think Bernie Madoff. When asked how he achieved his own success, Mr. MacDonald replied: "There are no short cuts, work hard, give back and work some more."

Mr. Onley told a group of NMP charities and students from Kingston, Ont.'s Queen's University School of Business and University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management that Moses Znaimer showed him the value of human capital by employing him at Toronto's City TV more than 25 years ago. Mr. Znaimer presented Mr. Onley, who contracted polio at an early age, with a job that allowed him to capitalize on his creativity and ambition. The lieutenant governor has gone on to enable many people with disabilities and allowed them to use their creativity and satisfy their ambitions. When asked how he had accomplished so much, he said, "I had a lot of help, and I have always remembered what goes around comes around."

This principle of reciprocity also is the basis of Ms. Thomlinson's work ethic. She and Janice Rubin established Rubin Thomlinson LLP, specializing in employment law, to enable them to be aligned with their moral and ethical values, which include respecting the dignity of individuals and seeking justice for all - qualities the news media often doesn't attribute to lawyers. Last year, the law firm created a profit-sharing concept, where the two business partners shared the profit with their staff and asked each one to decide where they would like to donate the funds. Giving back to the community in which they live and work with their employees instead of for their employees created a stronger sense of team and community within the firm.

A boxer, a representative of the Queen and a lawyer: This unlikely trio are examples of great leaders that aren't always making the news, but are making a difference in this world of ours.