



# PETER LEGGE

[ BY ROBYN JESSON ]  
PHOTOS BY DAVE HAMILTON

HE'S ENJOYED SUCCESS AT A LEVEL MANY OF US CAN ONLY DREAM OF—EVEN ACHIEVING THE ORDER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA—BUT TO PUBLISHING MAGNATE PETER LEGGE, IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT FAMILY...



“LEADERSHIP IS ALL ABOUT INFLUENCE, BUT THE FIRST PERSON YOU HAVE TO INFLUENCE IS YOU.”

be recognized for by my staff—he's fair, he's reasonable, he's boisterous and he's fun to be around. But at the end of the day, we get the job done.”

I mention that this particular issue of *Vancouver View* has a strong focus on business and ask if he would be willing to offer some advice to entrepreneurs just starting out.

“I've been in business for 36 years. It's as challenging today to keep your eye on the ball, on the bottom line, on the staff, on the clients, as it was when we started. The magazine business is a great business, it's a sexy business and it's a fun business—but it's hard work. So, my advice to young entrepreneurs is: find out what you're good at and what moves your heart and do that, but recognize that it's going to take a lot of hard work for a long period of time.”

Aside from passion and drive, what attributes does he think are important for someone to have in order to be successful in business?

“Do more than you're paid to do, then pretty soon you'll be paid for what you do. When you join a company, make yourself indispensable. You met Heidi [his assistant]—she has made herself indispensable. If I need to make cutbacks, she's the last person I'm going to cut. If I wanted to get into a company and was a young sales guy I'd say, 'I'll work for free for 60 days. I'll show up on time. I will represent your organization. If I produce, you agree to hire me. If I don't produce, we'll have no further discussion.' I think most people would get jobs that way. Without a job, you wouldn't be earning anything for those 60 days anyways—at least you would have an office, a boss to impress and if you're a sales guy, you simply sell so much space they can't do without you. I've encouraged people to do that—but I don't know anyone who's done it.”

Looking back 36 years to when he got his own start in the industry, Legge recalls a time he was considered dispensable.

“I think people might look at me today and think I'd never had a tough day in my life, but before I started Canada Wide Media, I was fired from my job at a radio station in Langley. But then I found this magazine called *Al Davidson's This Week*—a little television magazine that had just gone bankrupt. The contract the printers had with the owner of the magazine was that if he couldn't pay the printing bill they could seize the title, which would provide an asset to sell. I recognized that the \$72,000 debt the printer was left with looked bad on their balance sheet and I told them I could remove that bad debt and pay it off over five years. Working night and day, I ended up

Powerful entrepreneur, engaging speaker, philanthropist, loving family man—it's difficult to find an area in which Peter Legge has not yet achieved success. The president and CEO of the largest independently owned magazine publishing company in Western Canada—Canada Wide Media—oversees nearly 50 publications and over 130 staff, is one of North America's top public speakers, a bestselling author, the host of the Variety Club Telethon for 36 consecutive years (helping to raise \$160 million) and has been married to the same woman for 44 years.

Despite the many accomplishments, accolades and awards he's earned, Legge shows no sign of slowing down and cites the phrase ‘carpe diem’ as the guiding force behind his actions.

“We're only given so much time here... whether it's 20 years, 50 years, 85 years, you've got to do your very best every single day. You can't afford to waste a moment. So carpe diem: seize the day. If you give nothing, you will receive nothing. If you give plenty, you will receive plenty. I don't know why it works, but it works. Abraham Lincoln said, ‘People are as happy as they make up their minds to be.’ It is our thinking—you and I have control of only one aspect of our lives in reality and it's our thinking. Your thinking makes you successful in what you do.”

So, with that said, what's left on his bucket list? “Well, I certainly want to stay married until I'm no longer here. I want to have a wonderful relationship with my three children and their

husbands and my four grandchildren—maybe soon it will be five or six. That's the core for me. I want to continue to be a servant to the community, to do as much as I can to help. That's never-ending. I'd like to continue to grow the company. I'd like to either start more magazines or acquire more magazines. You're either growing or you're shrinking—you can't stay status quo.”

Born in England, Legge immigrated to Vancouver at twelve with his parents, filled with dreams of great opportunity. Now, regardless of the business opportunities a metropolis such as Toronto or Montreal could offer, he cannot imagine living or doing business anywhere but here.

“Where else in the world would you rather live than Vancouver? Yes, we get a little rain. Okay, a lot of rain. But if I've been travelling, when the plane is beginning to touch down in Vancouver, I'm so happy to be home. I love to go to England where I was born and try to get there once a year, but there's nowhere else I'd rather live than Vancouver. It has everything—you can golf, you can fish, you can go hiking, you can bicycle, you can

snow ski and water ski in the same day—it's just a beautiful place!”

Surely there must be *something* he'd change if he could? “Half the rain,” he laughs, before turning serious. “I don't know whether it's my age, but if I could change something I would make people understand what we have in Canada and what we have in Vancouver—there would be less complaining. Everybody is on somebody's case about something, whether it's about the government, the skytrain, the bike lanes... I know there are mistakes and I know some mistakes are newsworthy, but everybody is on somebody's case every day, every hour about something or other, and it's not that bad!”

Optimism and a positive outlook are clear values in Legge's business practice. With a staff of over 130 at Canada Wide Media's office in Burnaby and a roster of nearly 50 publications—both in print and online—having the morals and principles in place to ensure a smooth-running machine are important.

“Leadership is all about influence, but the first person you have to influence is you. If you're going to lead a staff, you have to influence them by your behaviour, by the standards you set and by the way you treat them. Yes, you need to be firm but you also need to be kind, you need to be gentle and you need to be encouraging. That is what I'd like to

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#### HOBBIES?

GOLF AND TRAVEL. I LIKE TO PLAY GOLF 50 TO 60 TIMES A YEAR. WE [HE AND HIS WIFE, KAY] LOVE CRUISING. WE'VE PROBABLY TAKEN 40 CRUISES AND ARE LOOKING AT ST. PETERSBURG AS OUR NEXT DESTINATION.

#### FAVOURITE RESTAURANTS?

MOST OF MY LUNCHEES DOWNTOWN ARE AT YEW RESTAURANT AT THE FOUR SEASONS, OR I GO TO DARIO'S IN THE ITALIAN CULTURAL CENTRE. IL GIARDINO'S IS NICE AS WELL. I LIKE TO HAVE BREAKFAST AT THE HOTEL VANCOUVER, AT GRIFFINS.

#### PROUDEST BUSINESS ACCOMPLISHMENT?

WHEN THE PROVINCE GAVE ME THE ORDER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA IN 2008 FOR 40 YEARS OF GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY. (PIN BELOW)



paying it off in just a year and renamed the magazine *TV Week*. No one was going to fire me again. I had made myself indispensable.”

Legge's eyes start twinkling when our conversation strays from shoptalk to the other important aspects of his life. Three successful daughters are the product of a loving marriage that's held strong for 44 years. Although the public speaking side of his career requires a considerable amount of travel, he tries to travel no more than one week a month to ensure he spends most of his time close to home. “My wife, Kay, lets me know when I've been working too much or travelling too much, and I recognize that. We try to have a date night at least once a week. My three girls are the loves of my life and now they're married with their own families. We will try to have at least a couple of family dinners a month—family is so important to us.”

He admits that it can be difficult to ‘turn off’ work sometimes, especially as his daughters have key positions within Canada Wide

Media themselves.

“I appreciate Kay saying, ‘You guys have 20 minutes to talk business. You can do it now, you can do it later, but you've only got 20 minutes.’ We talk about the company or the magazines and where we're going and what we're doing—it's neat to be able to do that. It's very boisterous around our table, everyone trying to get a word or two in. It's a lot of fun! I think it's important for families to have those times where they are all together.”

With such a strong family bond, Peter allows that he can't think of any regrets in his personal life and considers his relationship with his wife and kids one of his proudest accomplishments. When asked how he would like to be remembered, his answer is simple: as a loving husband, a great dad and granddad, a guy who was fair in business and one who was truly a servant of the community for many years.

I guarantee you it would be difficult to find anyone who would disagree. ■