



SUMMIT SERIES

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHTS



Drew Dudley, internationally acclaimed leadership speaker and author presents his opening keynote address at the APEX Leadership Summit 2024.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Everyday Leadership Your Own Philosophy and Values

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

Drew Dudley has a simple question he asks groups like the room full of (and those online) government executives attending this year's APEX summit: how many people feel like leaders?

He smiled broadly as hands raised slowly at the Shaw Centre in downtown Ottawa. Only about 40 per cent of the room put up their hands. That response is typical, he said. His point in the ice-breaking exercise was that often people are hesitant to identify with the title as it connotes a cockiness and arrogance that is driven by cultural expectations of the role of a leader.

As he strolled across the stage, Dudley linked those cultural expectations to the environment under which government executives work and tying it to an hour of high-octane challenges to the assembled leaders.

At the top of the list: look at your leadership more profoundly. "How do we create an expectation to create moments of leadership every day?" he asked. And from there, the more personal: "What is your personal leadership philosophy?"

Dudley said the philosophy question cuts to the heart of who and how we are as leaders. "If you can articulate it, it means you can practice it." A clear personal leadership philosophy makes leaders more effective, in part, because we are more likely to be trusted.

He advised executives to take the time to define themselves as a leader, "Why do you matter? You know you do."

When asked for advice on leading during the change in return to office policy, Dudley said lead with curiosity.

"You have to plan to make a difference. Hope is a terrible strategy."

When you face resistance ask yourself: "What are they afraid of? And what can I do to help them with the fear?" He said people often don't understand what they are afraid of and "you have to help them figure it out."

About the author

Meet Jack Branswell

----- BY CHRISTINA PULICKAL

Jack Branswell, Communications Director at Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is dedicated to enhancing communication strategies through training, mentoring, and coaching.

Having spent seven years as IRCC's Director of Strategic Communications, Jack has solidified his expertise in shaping impactful messages.

Before his tenure at IRCC, Jack held key editorial roles at Global News Service/Postmedia and contributed as a journalist to esteemed outlets like The Canadian Press.

Over 26 years in the media, Jack not only reported on significant events but also shared his insights as a part-time journalism instructor at Carleton and Concordia University.

Jack graciously volunteered his time and talent at the APEX 2024 Leadership Summit, where he diligently captured key takeaways from the keynote presentations.

His meticulous notes now serve as invaluable resources for APEX to share with its community, through these Summit Stories, allowing readers to reflect on the summit's impactful messages.



Jack Branswell: Director of Communications, IRCC



Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe, an expert on resiliency and workplace wellness, talks about how to stress wisely.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Be Well in an Unwell World

Tip #1: Swear

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

While most of the APEX Leadership Summit was focused on the profound, Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe focused on the profane.

“Why is it so good for many of us?” she asked a clearly interested audience, about expletives. “Because it means you don’t hold on to things so tightly. Holding onto things really affects your health.”

Swearing wasn’t her only tip to executives. She also walked her audience through the five elements of resilience: Belonging, perspective, acceptance, hope, and humour.

The importance of belonging is the sense that someone has our back. Dr. Hanley-Dafoe said. Perspective is aligning the head, heart and gut and acceptance is deciphering the “controllables” in our lives.

On hope she told the story of a platoon that she dealt who had a morale strategy for its soldiers: to leave household projects half finished before they went out on a tour of duty. “They left them as signs of hope that they would be home to finish those projects.”

Humour? In addition to the advice on invoking the invective, release and reprieve is what laughing physiologically does for your body.

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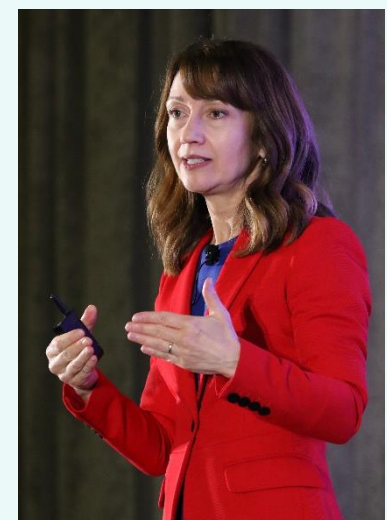
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The audience welcomed her own brand of off-beat humour, especially when she asked: “Have you all heard of stress before?”

In a twist, she said it’s our greatest ally, keeping us alive by telling us what is important. But she also noted that people are overworked and under rested. “Burnout is the curse of the strong.”

When Dr. Hanley-Dafoe speaks about resiliency, it’s from personal experience. As a young woman, she almost died as she crashed her car through ice.

She had to work herself out of the car, back through the ice and finally back to shore with the help of a man, Joseph Todd, who happened to see tire tracks. An enduring message on resilience: “No one has ever been saved alone.”



Marie-Hélène Pelletier
Photo Credit : Mike Pinder

In a parallel French session, called *Dynamic Resilience: Seizing the Opportunity Now*, Marie-Hélène Pelletier said that resilience is not an innate behaviour and that it’s important to have a strategic plan to develop and cultivate it throughout our lives.

The Ambassadors’ Message:

Use us, we are here to help.



Canadian Ambassadors join the APEX Leadership Summit 2024 virtually.
Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

In an increasingly complex and uncertain world, three of Canada’s ambassadors told the APEX Summit that there is a role for foreign missions to help departments and agencies on pretty much all their files.

“Every department is dealing with international issues,” said Dr. Ailish Campbell, Ambassador to the European Union. She was joined on screen by Tamara Mawhinney, Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, and Emmanuel Kamarianakis, Ambassador to Brazil.

Ambassador Mawhinney emphasized the blurring lines between international and domestic affairs, urging executives to leverage embassies as invaluable resources. She highlighted the importance of benchmarking and aligning Canada’s strategies with global best practices.

Ambassador Kamarianakis echoed the sentiment, advocating for a proactive approach to understanding global shifts and defending national interests amidst evolving governance structures and misinformation challenges.

The ambassadors closed on an upbeat note.

“Know that your leadership matters,” said Ambassador Campbell. “It matters for Canadians, but it is also creating examples for the world. It is a team sport. People look to us to give examples. We can be ambitious and clear with humility.”



Peter Mansbridge, the iconic former CBC News' chief correspondent, and anchor of The National joins the APEX Leadership Summit 2024 virtually from Scotland to deliver the final keynote address of day one.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Canada in 2024

Perspectives and Reflections from the Chief News Anchor

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

Peter Mansbridge, the iconic former CBC News' chief correspondent, and anchor of The National, sounded a note of caution for public servants navigating the choppy seas of public opinion—don't be afraid to speak up for yourselves. Mansbridge said that journalists and civil servants have much in common these days, starting with an erosion of public confidence in the work that we do.

"You are at a very pivotal moment," his voice and face, beaming in from the edge of the North Sea in Scotland, filling the room at the Shaw Centre.

"It's a moment of trust. Journalism is there too. A moment of crisis, and you could be heading that way too."

Mansbridge encouraged public servants to truly examine our relationship with the public. "We both need to think deeper and get to the root of the issues." For journalists, Mansbridge said part of the loss of trust rests on their shoulders. "Journalists need to be more transparent in how we do our work," and he suggested the public service heed that lesson too.

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Christine Fox introduces Peter Mansbridge.
Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

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Mansbridge, whose father was a senior bureaucrat, first federally and then in Alberta, said he has great respect for the public service. "The work you do, matters greatly." But he suggested the civil service is being buffeted by opinions such as there are too many public servants, they don't do anything, they are corrupt.

"Those feelings have consequences," he warned.

"Your work isn't being explained. The world is changing. Trust needs to be earned." He came back to the need to talk to Canadians about the work we do. "Don't be shy of being proud of what you do. Every one of you in this room is a leader. How are you going to make the public understand what you do?"

Christiane Fox, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary to Cabinet, who moderated the session said, "the Clerk has asked us to think about telling our story." She added: "We need to think about each of us being ambassadors for the public service."

Mansbridge did return several times to his theme. "Politicians come and go. The institution of government is permanent," he said.

"They (Canadians) do have to trust the machinery of government. The public service matters. Find a way to tell your story because it is a great story." In the question-and-answer period, Mansbridge was asked how leadership can best support teams in challenging times?

"Where do you look for success? Someone who listens carefully to their team.

Someone who has a plan, a vision." He said it was key to remain open to hearing team members' ideas as this makes the team and direction stronger.

"Leaders need to spend time out on the shop floor, listening to what is going right, what is going wrong. Leadership is a challenging thing. I was a newsroom leader. You need to work at it."



Sébastien Sasseville talks to the crowd on day two of the APEX Leadership Summit 2024 about how obstacles can be transformed into opportunities for growth.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Leadership is an Endurance Sport

Sébastien Sasseville knows a thing or two about leading through tough times.

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

The endurance athlete has summited Mount Everest (8,850 meters or 29,035 feet), ran the Sahara Race (7-day, 250 KM race), ran across Canada (7,500 KM journey or 180 marathons in 9 months) and finished the Race Across America, an ultra-distance cycling race known as the toughest race on earth. It crosses the U.S., from west to east (roughly 4,800 KMs), with cyclists on their bikes about 22 hours a day. He has done all of that with Type 1 Diabetes.

His presentation was a giant metaphorical tour de force of leadership and accomplishment. “The role of an athlete is to create favorable circumstances” to succeed, he said of his Everest climb. The most dangerous thing facing climbers on Everest, isn’t the cold, the lack of oxygen, the deep crevices or even the fatigue, it’s “involuntary complacency,” he said. Every aspect of an Everest climb is planned out, but he said they practiced hundreds of scenarios and faced none of them on the hill.

He noted that his teams have “no ego, no ego, no ego,” with everyone working towards a common goal. He stressed how leaders need to pay close attention to organizational culture.

“If we succeed the credit goes to the team, if we don’t then it is on me the athlete, the leader,” he said. “It isn’t a team of 10 people that supports me, it is one single team.”

He also stressed that the team is striving for something that is greater than them all and it achieved through the team.

“You have to adapt to what the mountain gives you everyday.”

Here were some of his tips for leadership:

- Leaders are “keepers of the meaning.”
- Think, speak, act, US. If you do everyone will work on the team for a common goal.
- Build a strong team, create memories.
- Optimism isn’t a nice to have as a leader—it’s essential.
- Find the strength and passion of each team member. Put them in a role where they can contribute the most.

“When you do that, it is extremely powerful. It is very contagious.”



Risha Grant shows the subtleties and values of diversity, equity and inclusion and the impact they create.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Creating Diverse, Inclusive Teams

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

“The price of inclusion is so much cheaper than the price of exclusion,” Risha Grant, the renowned diversity, inclusion and bias expert said.

It is a message that the American founder and CEO of her own company delivers to other companies, and it is both a balance sheet and a human capital equation that goes well beyond corporate accounting.

She said she wasn’t here to get people to change their opinions, she was just asking everyone “to be open, be honest (with yourself) and be engaged.”

“Inclusion is about us. That is where we link arms and make sure we are taking care of each other.”

The first step in embracing inclusion and assuring more diversity is being aware of our own unconscious bias. As she talked through stories of her upbringing and conversations with her grandmother, a maid to white people, she acknowledged that she struggles with trust with white people. She noted that unconscious bias is an unrecognizable part of our upbringing.

“My grandma’s story is not my story. If I want to carry grandma stuff from 1924 to 2024 then I am not allowing other people to grow.”

Grant challenged her audience to understand who are the people that make us feel uncomfortable and then to attribute the answer either to it being our fault or the other person’s fault.

The third layer of examination is questioning whether this is due to our own experiences, societal norms or beliefs instilled in us as children?

Her tips for being more inclusive:

- Don’t call people names or talk about them behind their back.
- Listen while others are speaking.
- Work/play with others.
- Be kind.

“Be kind. I know it sounds so elementary. Treat people with common courtesy and respect.”

If we want to build inclusion and diversity in our teams, Grant said to build authentic relationships; be intentional; question your assumptions and challenge microaggressions.

On that last issue, she advised to “address it with kindness. Some people truly don’t know. It is truly a skillset (dealing with microaggressions), and it has to be developed.”

Living the Public Service Values & Ethics

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

Christiane Fox, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary to Cabinet was joined on stage at the APEX Leadership Summit by political journalist, author and podcaster Paul Wells who got the audience laughing with this quip: “I’m flattered to be able to talk to you because many of you aren’t allowed to talk to me.”



Christiane Fox and Paul Wells talk about values and ethics in the public service.
Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Fox noted a few of the recent challenges in the V&E space, including mis and disinformation, social media and public’s servants use of it in their private lives, and conflict of interest issues that arose from ArriveCan, among others.

Wells noted, in his observation, that efforts to codify our values and ethics always seem to come on the heels of “big trouble” such as the sponsorship scandal and other very public conflict of interest cases.

One of the V&E inflection points is over the ownership of files and responsibility, Fox says. “How do we bring back a little more of the ownership on files?” she asked. Her concern is that more layers and more rules will hurt our ability to be nimble.

Wells said he certainly has noticed the accountability issue in his dealings with civil servants.

“It is really hard for anyone to own a decision, but there are a lot of examples of people being blamed when something goes wrong,” he said to more than a few nods in the crowd. “There doesn’t seem to be a lot of upsides,” to making decisions. Wells also wondered if what the public service really needs is more courage.

Fox added that “We need clear accountability. The people who are responsible for a function need to be part of the conversation and be very clear on their responsibilities.”



Amber Mac, innovation speaker, co-host, The Feed on SiriusXM and President, AmberMac Media, Inc. shares her lessons about AI.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Four Lessons to Thrive in Our AI Future

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL
(NOT REALLY)

It seemed only logical to compute that I should try ChatGPT for this assignment and see how the bot would do versus this ink-stained wretch. What follows below is the AI version of Mac's presentation.

In a captivating keynote presentation, tech expert Amber Mac addressed the accelerating influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on modern life and work. Speaking on the theme "Four Lessons to Thrive in Our AI Future," Mac offered a comprehensive view of how AI is reshaping industries, underscoring both the challenges and opportunities it presents.

One of the key messages Mac delivered was the importance of relentless adaptation in the face of technological advances. Drawing a parallel to the introduction of the first elevator in 1857, she noted how initial discomfort gave way to transformative urban development. Similarly, she urged the audience to view AI as a "magical co-pilot" that can assist and enhance human capabilities.

She stressed the necessity of living in "predictable unpredictability" and called for perfect prioritization in adapting to AI's rapid evolution. This adaptability, according to Mac, involves a continuous process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. She pointed out that AI's capacity doubles every six months, which parallels the increasing need for human skills to evolve in tandem.

Emphasizing the role of digital trust, Mac shared a story of the Mayor of New York City using AI to communicate in languages he doesn't speak, highlighting the need for transparency and consistency in AI applications. She also discussed AI's potential to democratize access to technology and education, stressing the importance of addressing the digital divide.

Mac was particularly vocal about the need for Canada to take a leading role in regulating AI to protect mental health, especially for children. She criticized the tendency to wait for other countries to act first and advocated for proactive measures: "We have to stop waiting for what Australia is going to do. We have to be first in some of these things."

Concluding her talk, Mac reiterated the profound potential of AI to benefit humanity, provided it is implemented thoughtfully and ethically. "We need AI. It can be the tool that helps us move forward with purpose," she said, advocating for frameworks that balance innovation with caution.

Amber Mac's presentation was a compelling call to action, urging individuals and organizations to embrace AI's potential while remaining vigilant about its ethical implications. Her insights provided a roadmap for thriving in an AI-driven future, blending optimism with a realistic understanding of the challenges ahead.

Writer's Note:

I haven't changed anything in the story that ChatGPT created. I would note that it is pretty close to what I would have written though, with some relatively minor emphasis on some things over others.

Here are a few things I would have changed: the headline. Synergy is a weak and vague word that doesn't draw an audience into a story in a headline.

In the lead I would have changed the use of industries to make it more specific to the audience, but I didn't instruct it to do that, so garbage in, garbage out.

It made an assumption on calling the presentation "captivating" but it wasn't wrong, in my opinion. It didn't quite capture the complexity of this: "predictable unpredictability" and called for perfect prioritization in adapting to AI's rapid evolution."

And it also wrongly attributed the learning, unlearning and relearning bit to Mac when it was actually from Alvin Toffler, the famed writer and futurist. But again, my notes didn't make that clear to ChatGPT.

Two parting thoughts on this experience. I wonder if the bot had a moment of existential consideration when in the article it writes about its own growth?

My own existential consideration on this comes from a New York Times quote that Mac used in a slide in her presentation (I hid that from the bot). It said: "When your technical skills are eclipsed, your humanity will matter more than ever."

Phew! I still have my humanity.



Rick Hansen, Man in Motion and Champion for Accessibility and Inclusion delivers the final keynote address of the APEX Leadership Summit 2024.

Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Keep Going, Never Give Up!

A Reminder from Canada's Man in Motion

----- STORY BY JACK BRANSWELL

Rick Hansen, the man who wheeled himself across the world, challenged executives at the APEX Leadership Summit to “focus on moving from disability to ability” as we continue to work for a more inclusive workplace with greater numbers of persons with disabilities.

Hansen, the last speaker at the two-day summit, spoke with passion and inspired his audience as he talked about his tour, which covered 40,075 KMs through 34 countries over a two-year span. He shared his story on how riding in a truck that overturned as it hit loose gravel on the shoulder of the road near Willams Lake, B.C., change his life at 15 and left him paralyzed from the waist down.

When he was lying in his hospital bed, Hansen said he saw the wheelchair as a sign of disability, but he realized he was going to need to embrace using it. “There were a lot of hard times and limitations,” he said, as he wheeled himself back and forth on the stage. “Every now and again, you need people to inspire you.” Hansen said he found that in an older wheelchair athlete, Stan Strong, who became a mentor to him.

Hansen also befriended Terry Fox and convinced him to play on the same wheelchair basketball team, the Vancouver Cable Cars. Fox had “extraordinary determination. He wanted to pay it forward. He inspired a nation and a world,” Hansen told his audience. “I wanted to think about what I could do to pay it forward.”



Rick Hansen chats with participants after his summit presentation.
Photo Credit: Mike Pinder

Hansen noted and was thankful that External Affairs, as Global Affairs Canada was called back then, was instrumental in working with his organization to him get him into and across countries. He added that too often “big dreams are killed by fear”.

“There are no walls too big in life that can’t be climbed,” he reminded his engrossed audience. “Keep going. There is a way around it, through it, over it. Keep going.”

Last summer, for the first time in 50 years Hansen went back to the site of the crash and it stirred a question he is sometimes asked on whether if he had a chance to go back, would still get into the back of that truck?

“When it happened, I never would have gotten in that truck. Now, of course, every time I would get back into that truck. Every time. It’s about knowing that you have a purpose and that you can make a difference.

I feel like one of the luckiest guys on the planet. It is what we do with it that counts.” He left the crowd with this reminder of our mission and a message of hope.

“The mark of this country is how we treat the most vulnerable.

I will never forget the hope that I have for humanity, even when things are going badly.

We need to keep building bridges.”

---Rick Hansen