

Connections '05
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Speaking Notes

Check Against Delivery

You can't see the forest for the trees.

That's the cliché.

But what exactly does it mean?

Well, it's a nice way of saying: You don't get the big picture.

Anyone who's too caught up in the details... that's when we say: He can't see the forest for the trees.

When members of an organization, any organization, get too obsessed with putting out... this fire, or that fire, - or even fires they started themselves... then we can legitimately say: They can't see the forest for the trees.

Which has nothing to do with putting out forest fires.

Or blazing infernos.

Which brings me to my honeymoon with Jeanette.

Well, not exactly, but bear with me for a moment.

When Jeanette and I got married, we wanted to do something both of us had long dreamed of: Deep Powder Skiing. After all; it was a Winter Wedding: Why go to Hawaii when you could have an adventure holiday - like powder skiing - which neither of us had ever done.

Hooked on the energy of the images of pairs of skiers in perfect interlocking deep powder turns, we booked ourselves our high country paradise. What could be a more Canadian honeymoon? And after all, we felt: *We're young. We're strong skiers; let's go for it.*

We couldn't afford helicopter skiing, so we opted for the slightly more-affordable Cat-Skiing, where you board one of these large snow-cat to reach those deep mountain bowls of your dreams: Meadow Creek, in the Selkirks. Ironically, Jeanette's ex-boyfriend recommended the place. He said it was the most romantic place he'd ever been. As things turned out, it took me a long time to forgive him.

As the day grew near, we each grew a little apprehensive: though we were strong skiers on the groomed slopes of Alberta, neither of us had ever attempted deep powder skiing.

But we were ready for an adventure. How hard could it be. Right?

When we arrived at the mountain lodge, we were taken by the setting... and wondered exactly who would be sharing our adventure.

Luckily, Jeanette spied a few shorter skis by the door as we arrived, and relaxed knowing that there would be some female companionship. As it turned out, the short skis belonged not to women... but simply... to shorter men.

Yes.

That's right.

Jeanette and I spent our honeymoon in a back country ski lodge with 9... Other... Men.

We took our stuff to our room and discovered that a lodge catering primarily to men addicted to deep powder skiing had rooms with - of course - two single beds.

But that was fine. After all, we were there for the skiing, right?

The next morning we got ready, loaded up on breakfast and coffee, grabbed our skis - mine were 210s; Jeanette's were 190s - for you non-skiers... that's rather long - and headed out to the snow-cat. The guide glanced at our skis, but... only said:

These... yours?

We tried to ignore the almost imperceptible shake of his head.

Riding up in the snow-cat, we couldn't help but notice... all the trees. Forest, yes... but... *trees*. And lots of them.

Well - we reasoned - guess you have to go up through the trees to get up to those big pristine bowls of powder. Or maybe this route was taken to keep the bowls looking prettier; not all tracked up by the snow cats.

But, we had seen the big white bowls and we didn't seem to be heading anywhere near them.

Finally, I got the courage to ask where exactly we were heading. Mark, the guide, told us that with all the new snow the avalanche risk was too high, so we were heading up to ski the trees.

Ski the trees.

Okay, I reasoned: *Areas with just enough trees to hold the snow... but would still allow us lots of room to get through.*

And anyway, we have youth on our side: We can keep up to these 50 year olds.

After an hour riding up the mountain, the Cat came to a shuddering stop above an area called Rolling Thunder... with an awful lot of trees. Which was good, because by now the coffee and the bumpy ride meant it was time to use the facilities. And looking around, the only facilities were the trees. *Plenty* of trees. In fact that's all we could see. For the trees... were most definitely... a forest.

Waist deep in snow is tough enough for the male of the species. To relieve himself. But for a woman in a one-piece ski suit, and 10 male witnesses... Well, 10 men averted their gaze. That was Jeanette's last coffee for the rest of the week.

And then - in a wink – the other men were into their skis and, like magic... the Cat was gone, the other skiers were gone, and apparently... our confidence had gone with them.

We faced our first run, gritted our teeth and pushed off.

In case you don't know, skiing deep powder, the kind where you sink to your waist, is VERY different from any other skiing. The snow can just grab your skis and pull your legs apart like a wishbone. I wiped out almost immediately, and simply disappeared under the snow.

Jeanette barely made it to the first tree when she hit a snow snake. Not a relative of

Bigfoot; snow snakes are branches under the snow that stop you cold in your tracks.
Or at least stop your feet; momentum has no such plan for the rest of your body. Simply:
Crash.

The second run, Jeanette slid into a tree well, the deep open space around the trunk of an evergreen tree after several feet of fresh snow have fallen.

No limbs severed; arboreal or human. But into the tree well she went.

Skis off. Powder over her head.

And no way to get out. Try as we did to extricate her, neither of us could really gain purchase on anything.

We were... completely immersed in that very soft white stuff we'd been dreaming of for ages. The beach in Hawaii was looking better and better.

By the end of run # 2 and an untold number of falls, I'd had enough. Digging myself out after every fall—it was kind of like a cartoon; a big line and then a big wipe-out—I was so red in the face that Jeanette was afraid I might have a heart attack.

If you're going to die of a heart attack on your honeymoon, it's not supposed to be from skiing.

But Jeanette, who was the better skier of us, was more determined. She *had* to prove herself.

And did. Or *tried*: Third trip up, and third trip down... she hit a third tree. Smack. Slowed down by the deep snow, she wasn't going very fast at the time, but... by then the rest of the skiers were out of sight, and alone with only the beep-beeping of her avalanche transponder, she momentarily thought she was lost.

That pretty well sums up the entire first day of our honeymoon.

To say we were disappointed doesn't quite cover it.

Jeanette and I are fairly upbeat people. We don't get down too easily. And here we were at the official start of our married lives together... and we... were... miserable.

We spent that entire first day... mired in futility. And snow. And trees.

The exhilaration of being at one with the earth and sky? The closest we got was the ride in the snow cat back up to Rolling Thunder. Or Futility Ridge as I quietly renamed it. But ride up we did. We'd paid for 6 trips; we were taking them, even if we weren't skiing down.

Heck; by riding up AND down we doubled OUR return on investment.

But sitting in a snow cat in now damp clothing; well... everything, EVERYTHING started to ache.

That night... in our single beds... Jeanette - with raw feet - *SNOW SNAKES* - aching shoulders - *TREE WELLS* - and sore everything else - *TREE; FACE FIRST* - said those three little famous newlywed words: Don't. Touch. Me.

We prayed that night for it to stop snowing.

So we could ski the bowls...

Next morning it was snowing even harder. We felt sick. We had paid so much money, yet we were already counting and dreading the remaining runs. 6 runs a day for 5 days. 24 to go!

We couldn't eat, Jeanette wouldn't even drink coffee, and then we were once again in the Snow Cat... and all we could see were those trees. All we could think was: We. Can't. Do. This. We were terrified. I've heard of newlyweds being scared about the honeymoon, but this... this was different.

However...

That morning we *had* rented the right equipment, special deep powder skis.

And when Mark, the guide, heard us say... *there are just so many trees...* he looked at us and said words which have since proved more insightful in so many other ways and so many other circumstances: He said:

You keep talking about the trees. But there are spaces between the trees.

Don't look for the trees, look for the spaces.

“Look for the spaces”?

Yeah. Look for the spaces.

I waited for the punch-line. There was none.

Instead, he repeated; *Look for the spaces.*

... and he was right.

We climbed out of the snowcat, and onto our powder skis... and we pushed off. And I remember this oh-so-clearly: we very consciously looked for the spaces...

And we went for a space...

And the equipment... *worked*. Instead of submarines they floated. Like little toboggans.

And we made it through the first 2 or 3 spaces... and suddenly... we shared a feeling of “*Wow.... This is possible*”.

And by the end of skiing Wednesday instead of “*Oh, no there’s still 12 more runs*” it was now “*Gee, there’s only 12 more runs*”.

By Friday... we were transformed. We were... actually... starting to master it... and all because we were well-equipped... and *looking for the spaces*.

And deep in Rolling Thunder powder, we finally felt that we belonged, even with the other 9 men... *And we never did let on it was our honeymoon.*

That’s a true story.

And a true lesson.

And what on earth does it have to do with us being here tonight?

Well, if we're going to fully grasp the unparalleled opportunities this province has, we need a government that's able to see the spaces. For far too long politics in Alberta has been about obstacles, reasons why things *can't* be done, teachers *can't* be hired, seniors *can't* be supported.

For too long it's been about nothing but... the trees.

But where others see trees, where others see problems... WE need to see opportunity. To see the spaces.

Don't just rail about climate change.

Invest in the science and technology of cleaner energy. Become a leader. Because fossil fuels aren't an infinite resource: human *ingenuity* is.

Health care? Nothing but problems?

Our Health Care system is doing an awful lot of things right. And the people actually working in the system can each lay claim to making spaces between the problems. But we have to recognize what a resource these Health Care workers are.

Let's remember that Alberta once had a great public Health Care system. Let's find ways to improve what we have, rather than only seeing a forest of reasons to abandon what's still there.

Let's stop seeing education as an expense, and instead see it as an investment.

Let's instead... *See... Those... Spaces*: that this is a thriving and prosperous province in a country of unbelievable opportunity. Why must we look at other governments and see only obstacles, when it's our job as politicians to cultivate every partnership and strategic alliance we can. We are Edmontonians and Calgarians and every other city and town in Alberta; we are Albertans; AND we are Canadians, and I refuse to believe that those identities are mutually exclusive!

And the Liberal Party?! As Aman Gill said in the invocation, WE have to learn to see the spaces, the opportunities, the common ground.

How will we do it? How will we get through the trees?

In part, by having a plan. In fact: the planning process has been underway for months. There was a survey of ALP members at the convention in Calgary in June.

We've had workshops with MLAs.

We've had workshops with party executives.

Tomorrow you are all invited to the session to review and expand the draft mission, values and principles. I hope to present the results to the ALP board at our next meeting in mid-October. Help us map our route through the spaces... and beyond.

Consider the Vision Statement that has emerged from our planning work: Here it is: Alberta Liberals will provide affordable, openly accountable government that inspires trust and confidence of Albertans and leads the way to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future.

There are four components to it:

1. Democratic Reform; 2. Social Development; 3. Economic Sustainability; and 4. Environmental Protection.

To make that vision come true we need to keep building our organization. And part of that means we need to get rid of the debt.

Every day, far too much of our money gets drained off to service a debt that was created in 2001.

Every dollar that goes to that debt could be better used... to expand our membership, on improved communications, or on getting ready for the next election.

A few weeks ago we quietly launched our Defeat the Debt campaign. Our goal is to get at least 250 people to contribute on average \$100 a month that will go straight to the debt. After the tax credit, that's a cup of Tim Horton's a day. We already have over 100 people signed up, some for \$25 or \$50 a month, some for \$200. But once we have the equivalent of 250 at \$100 a month, that debt will be gone in less than three years. What a lightening of our burden that will be.

If you think you can afford to help, at whatever level, there is a booth right over there. As they say on TV: Operators are Standing By. Perhaps you can join that hundred who have already stepped up to get the right equipment... to help us navigate... the *spaces*.

This has been an extraordinary year:

We went from 3 incumbents to 16.

We ran a great campaign without borrowing a single cent.

We established ourselves as the party of ideas.

We established ourselves as the party of leadership.

We earned a hold in Calgary - we have as many seats there, as the Tories have in Edmonton.

We were heard in the Legislature:

- about the Alberta Securities Commission
- about the Grizzly Bear hunt
- about minimum wage
- seniors benefits and long-term care
- AISH benefits
- the endowment fund for post-secondary education
- and many many more issues

But we can't rely on anyone but us for the complete adoption of Alberta Liberal policies.

Change in Alberta is long, long overdue. Consider this: Social Credit was first elected in

1935, and in the 70 years since this province has seen one change of government. One! An entire lifetime and only one change in government. That's not bizarre... that's pathological!

Just think of it this way: We're offering the citizen's of Alberta an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Our first nomination for the next election is next week in Edmonton Castle Downs, where I fully expect the next MLA to be none other than Chris Kibermanis. And before autumn is over, Chris is going to have plenty of company as we gear up our nominations!

It's time to shift Alberta's political life... to one of hope and confidence. We will form a government that refuses to rely on fear... A government that focuses forward on the great opportunities ahead of us.

We're pulling together the right frame of mind, the right focus—*we can see the spaces*. We know we can win; and we're getting the organization - the plan, the money, the people - getting everything in place to make sure it will happen.

Thank you so much for being here tonight. We know that we have your support. After all, we're all in this together.

Yes there are trees...

But more importantly, there are spaces.

Don't look for the trees; look for the spaces.