



Some people for youth to look up to; At a time when 'role models' are created every minute, the genuine article is more valuable

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Illustrations: Photo: Thomas Cheng, Agence France-Presse / The good and not-so-good role models: Mother Teresa and...

Photo: Kevin Winter, Getty Images / ...Lindsay Lohan.

Our culture of instant celebrity allows almost anyone to call him or herself a good role model. Britney Spears did it, sometime before public nudity possibly, and Perez Hilton did it too. Hilton, the celebrity gossip blogger, called himself a positive role model "just based on the sheer fact of my existence" -- or in other words, for breathing.

It makes us wonder, what happened to the term "role model?" Historically, it was a term used by sociologists. Robert K. Merton coined the term in his study of medical students to describe a reference group to which people compare themselves or aspire to become. Today, we use the term to describe anyone who sets an example. Mother Teresa: Good role model. Lindsay Lohan: Not so much.

Or, so we thought was the case. However, in an age of reality TV and non-stop social media, there are platforms that can help catapult anyone to stardom. Generation Y seems especially fascinated with what lip-syncing pop stars and Internet celebrities are posting online and takes that information to heart. Ask any tween-ager what they'd like to do someday, and you're more likely to hear about "next top models" than "cures for cancer."

This made us reflect on last week's announcement by the Junior Achievement of B.C. (JABC) when it named four people being honoured as the 2010 inductees to the B.C. Business Laureates Hall of Fame. The hall of fame was created by JABC to recognize the entrepreneurial and civic contributions of business leaders, but also to fulfill JABC's mandate to encourage our youth to aspire to similar heights -- to establish good role models.

Alex Campbell, Jack Diamond, Bob Lee, and Jack Poole are each being awarded with the title of "good role model" after decades of hard work. Yet, without a mass of Twitter followers, are any of our young people paying attention to the stories of these community leaders?

Merton also coined the term "self-fulfilling prophecy," which spells out potentially terrible things for the cohort recently dubbed the "Facebook generation" but we would like to refrain from painting too bleak a picture. For the generation inheriting the challenges of global warming, smart warfare, carbon hunting and unprecedented worldwide information sharing, we'd like to believe that social media and information technology will only help future leaders to achieve more than we can

imagine.

We also believe they'll have to take a lesson from history and the examples set by the 2010 business laureates to do so.

Alex Campbell, for example, proved that steely determination yields results. The founding CEO of Thrifty Foods built his legacy, starting at age 15, when he started at SuperValu as a grocery clerk. Campbell worked his way into various management positions in grocery chains before setting out on his own. He dedicated 25 years to his business before retiring, as well as countless hours to community betterment endeavors in education, the environment and the arts.

The late Jack Poole taught B.C. that, with perseverance, anybody can build a legacy. Poole started out life in rural Saskatchewan, the son of farmers. He was married by 17 and the father of four daughters four years later.

Despite having limited resources at his start, Poole managed to create one of Canada's most successful real estate companies and, in semi-retirement, brought the 2010 Winter Olympic Games to life for Vancouver. Poole was awarded an Order of Canada in 2006 for his philanthropic work and is remembered by associates as someone who approached every challenge with confidence.

Bob Lee and the late Jack Diamond were also trusted leaders who built their legacies over decades.

Bob Lee founded Prospero Group and pioneered the creation of business relationships with those leading the booming Asian market.

Jack Diamond built a business with Pacific Meat Company, which he acquired in 1940, and also contributed to the development of sport and education in B.C.

He is remembered by many as the true builder of Simon Fraser University, where he served as chancellor in the school's early days.

All four B.C. Business Laureates Hall of Fame inductees prove that great change can come from visionary thinking, patience and hard work. The questions now are, 'Who will be winning these awards in 50 or 100 years?' and 'Who will be the history-makers of the next century?'

We have faith the next generation will take its cue from these leaders and think long-term. At any rate, we've set up a Twitter account (@BCbizlaureates) because you can never be too sure.

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