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IT'S ONLY RESTING

p. 40 BACK-TO-SCHOOL
ENGAGEMENT

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MARKETING

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Good Work

SHILL FOR THE CAUSE,
NOT THE MAN

WHY NON-PROFITS
WILL RULE MARKETING

ADMIT IT:
YOUR PRO BONO WORK
IS AWARDS BAIT



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Habitat for Humanity's Sophie Turner



GOOD

WORK

GOING FROM SELLING SOAP
REVEAL WHY THEY MADE
THE MAN

TO SAVING LIVES, CANADIAN MARKETING AND AD EXECS
THE MOVE TO NON-PROFITS TO WORK FOR THE CAUSE, NOT

By David Brown

For Catherine Clement, the “epiphany” came while doing research on the box colour for a toilet bowl cleaner.

“I was sitting in a market research focus group and thinking, ‘You know, I don’t really care what colour it is. This has no meaning to me.’”

It wasn’t just the toilet bowl cleaner, but the work in general. “I was going through the motions with no real personal connection,” she says. With that sudden clarity, the move first to the public sector and then not-for-profit was a natural one. Today she is vice-president, partnerships, public engagement and communications for the Vancouver

Foundation, which facilitates larger community development projects funded from multiple smaller donations, doing work she feels passionate about every day. “I like to be engaged in things that are meaningful to me personally and my community and my world,” she says.

People who go into marketing are obviously drawn to selling, positioning and moving the needle. Most have no problem thinking of people as “consumers” first. Everyone may have their personal limits (like not taking on tobacco clients), but it’s likely many others have similar epiphanies when they stop and ask what the point is.

It happened to Sophie Turner, director of marketing and communications at Habitat for Humanity Toronto. She spent 17 years in marketing, most of them with American Express after getting her start at Nike.

She found the experience invaluable, but grew tired of

the big corporation “antics” and “craziness” ubiquitous throughout most big companies. She began to feel that some of her co-workers and bosses had lost perspective, obsessing over minutia that would have no impact on the company or customers. “You are not a brain surgeon. You are not saving lives,” she would think, though it became clear her bosses had different opinions about the importance of the work.

“That’s where I struggled for the last couple of years, just trying to get away from that mentality.”

While “what-am-I-doing-here?” moments are not unique to the communications industry, the amount of volunteer and pro bono work done by marketing professionals and agencies across the country suggests a moral assumption that giving back comes with the territory. Perhaps this expedites the move of so many to full-time “good” work.

But speak with professionals who have actually left the for-profit world and you’re unlikely to hear any quotes from *No Logo*. Most will tell you they feel good about helping people and even saving lives, but you won’t hear rants about the evils of consumer advertising and big business. Far from it.

“[We] need the corporate sector to be fruitful and prosperous,” says Jeff Moat, a former finance and telecom marketing executive who joined Canadian Blood Services in 2004 and is now vice-president, partners for mental health, at the Mental Health Commission of Canada. “Prosperous companies mean a healthy economy which is good for charities.”

Jim Diorio, creative director at Toronto-based agency

JAMIE HOGGE

“You have to be really creative and follow your marketing principles to a tee” —Taslim Somani

Manifest Communications, which specializes in non-profit work, has a more colourful explanation for leaving the for-profit world.

“If you are looking for the answer [like] ‘I was sick and tired of selling things and I wanted to redeem myself by coming here,’ you are not going to get that,” says Diorio. He often hears from people looking to join the agency to soothe a troubled conscience over the work they’ve done.

It doesn’t impress him. “There are 10 million ways to redeem yourself without having to change the way you’ve worked,” he says. “If you want to redeem yourself, leave work at 4 o’clock and do some volunteering. You can still do your job selling cars and contribute to the economy and all that great stuff. But you don’t have to completely put on the hair shirt. You don’t have to change your way of life and your whole career path because you think you’re selling the devil’s goods.”

So why did he, like so many senior-level marketing executives, do it? Five themes emerge.

1. IT IS COMPLEX, OFTEN MORE CHALLENGING WORK

If you think selling a product is tough, convincing people to donate money for no immediate, personal gratification is no easy brief either. But that challenge is what drew Diorio to Manifest Communications.

Back in his days as writer and creative director with Lowe Roche, Diorio got a thrill trying to sell \$100,000 cars. “It was a very complex sell of a very complex thing, and I really got into that,” he says.

But when he felt no excitement about selling commodity products or consumer packaged goods, he knew it was time to look for another job. Now, instead of selling new shoes or the latest smartphone or soap, Manifest and Diorio are trying to get people to think about voting or how to fight cancer or the importance of youth education. “It is harder creatively because you don’t have a product very often,” says Diorio.

On top of that, you need to communicate with a much broader demographic while not alienating other charities that are also vying for those donor dollars, he says.

“There is just a depth to it that keeps it much more interesting,” adds Clement on why she revels in the non-profit sector. “It is not about packaging. It is not marketing a product or service. It is about communicating an issue. It is actually harder... In this world you need to explain an idea to people and why it matters to them.”

And, oh yeah, you have to do it with a smaller budget.

“Charities have an unwillingness to spend money in order to make money,” says Taslim Somani, who joined Stephen Thomas as director, digital marketing, in 2008 from Fedex. Stephen Thomas focuses solely on not-for-profit clients. “So whatever money they spend, they want to make sure they have a positive ROI against every single dollar.” Not that all marketing departments aren’t under similar pressures, but at least at a corporation, nobody is questioning whether they should be spending money on marketing at all (*see Charity Incorporated, pg. 31*).

“You have to be really creative and follow your mar-

keting principles to a tee. You can’t just throw money at something because you want to try something out. It has to be results-oriented and that is a really cool challenge,” she says. “It forces you to be really structured in your marketing fundamentals.”

2. YOU ARE PAID LESS, BUT REWARDED MORE

Smaller budgets also mean smaller salaries. That’s a given. In some cases, work-life balance is a positive trade-off. “We have a big mission ahead of us, but my CEO doesn’t BlackBerry me every night,” says Turner. “Whereas in the past if I didn’t respond to the things that could have waited six more days *that night*, it was a big deal.”

But that’s not always the case.

“People thought I was a little bit crazy being in digital and going back to work for the non-profit sector, just from a monetary standpoint,” says Somani, who previously worked with the Red Cross.

“I probably work as hard or harder than I ever worked at any other job. So I don’t think the whole work-life balance is any better.”

However, people are compensated with the knowledge they are contributing to very large, very important causes. “I go to bed at night knowing that the work that my team accomplished that day helped save a life,” says Moat.

After a career in increasingly senior positions on both the client and agency sides, Rosalie McGovern also says she’s being paid less to work for the Sick Kids Foundation in Toronto. But it is worth it.

“It’s not that I was ever unhappy, but there’s a different sense of satisfaction in knowing you are actually contributing,” she says, comparing her current job to previous career stops. “It puts things into perspective when you see children and they are pushing the chemotherapy IVs around. Or you look at the parents and the strength in their faces because they are dealing with children who can sense whether they are worried or hopeful or upset.

“And you come back and you do your little marketing job; it really does put things in perspective that this is really the meaning of life and anything we can do to help it, I’m there.”

3. IT’S A PASSION PLAY, OFTEN A PERSONAL ONE

Moat had worked mainly in finance and telecom for about 15 years when an opportunity came up at Canadian Blood Services. “My mom was dying from cancer at the time,” he says. Blood donations often become important for patients going through cancer treatments so the work at CBS suddenly became more important. “At the time it caused me to reflect and ask myself, what did I want to do with my career?”

Later, he was contemplating a move to the Mental Health Commission of Canada when the 14-year-old daughter of NHL player Luke Richardson took her own life.

“It was one of those moments in life when you face an important choice. I could have chosen to let this opportunity go by, or instead, I could raise my hand, be counted

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“It’s not that I was ever unhappy, but there’s a different sense of satisfaction in knowing you are actually contributing”

—Rosalie McGovern

"I was going through the motions with no real personal connection," says Catherine Clement, recalling her decision to leave the for-profit sector to do work that felt more meaningful to her.



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and say ‘this is no longer acceptable. This really matters, and I’m going to do something about it,’” he says. “I have two young daughters and I couldn’t possibly imagine what losing a child to suicide would be like.

“But I did know that I could make a difference. My decision was made.”

After marketing jobs with Kewadin Casinos in Michigan, and Ontario Lottery and Gaming, Matt Sepkowski joined the Canadian Cancer Society about a year ago. “I wanted to take my marketing experience and put it to work in an organization where I felt I could have the greatest impact. I also have an immediate family member who has been touched by cancer so it is very meaningful,” he says. “She developed cancer at a very young age and I witnessed the impact the disease had on her and her young family.”

And when Turner set out to find work in the non-profit world, she was drawn to Habitat for Humanity, which builds homes for families in need.

Turner was brought up by a single mother who didn’t have a lot of money, so she understood the challenges of housing. “[The cause] was something I felt very emotional about and attached to.” Once she started interviewing, she knew Habitat was right for her.

“What was appealing to me was that everyone I spoke to was extremely passionate about what they do and not worried about that bonus at the end of the year. Because there is no bonus.”

“Passion” is a word that comes up a lot when talking with marketing executives about their organizations and the people who work there. “We tend to be believers,” says Clement. “We tend to have a real sense of the passion for something.”

Somani was about to complete a maternity leave after the birth of her daughter when she saw the posting for Stephen Thomas. “I thought, ‘oh my gosh, this is a perfect marriage between my experience and my passion to do better for the world.’”

4. IT’S VERY HANDS ON, BUT IN A GOOD WAY

Tired of the politics, process and bureaucracy at your company? Frustrated because you rarely have any impact at work? Then the org chart of a not-for-profit may be a better fit.

These are flatter organizations with smaller staffs that rely on volunteers (did we mention smaller budgets?).

After years with Scotiabank and then Thornley Fallis, self-described change agent Michael Seaton was drawn to the CNIB because he saw an opportunity to be part of the rebirth of the Ottawa-based charity that provides assistance and services to the blind and visually impaired.

“It was the ability to once again roll up my sleeves and affect a large amount of change, and something that I could control directly,” he says. There’s a lot less bureaucracy, but it’s also harder to recruit the best and the brightest, he says.

If you were a specialist before, be ready to be a generalist now, adds Moat. “It forces you to become an expert in many different areas.”

But with that kind of involvement you’ll find yourself very close to the end result, also an attraction for Seaton. “We actually deliver services to the people who need it. It is a very direct connection to the cause,” he says. Which brings us to our next point...

5. IT COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE

When you’re that involved in the work and you share the purpose of those working alongside you, it can change your life.

Habitat’s Turner says that while she’s only been on the job for four months, her involvement in the cause has changed her life away from work. Aside from driving by open spaces in the city and pondering what it would take to build a house there, she’s actually talking about work with her husband and kids. “And I didn’t really do that with Amex, to be honest.”

Stephen Thomas creative director Bryan Tenenhouse says he feels a strong connection to the work for clients like Kids Help Phone. The agency’s “Buy a Kid Some Time” campaign that ran during the holiday season in 2009 and 2010 encouraged donors to buy counselling time for troubled youth. The program had a dramatic increase in the number of monthly donors, which had a direct impact on the number of counsellors available to help troubled youth. In other marketing programs you may have the same kinds of results, he says. “But you are not necessarily saving lives. It is *that* dramatic. If a kid can’t get through on that line, there could be a suicide,” he says.

Tenenhouse, too, says he’s more inclined to talk about his job with his family. “The kids know everything and that wasn’t always true. I never talked about work before,” he says. He’s even made sure his kids have the Kids Help Phone number. One of the lessons Tenenhouse learned working on Help Phone was that parents always think it can’t be their kid. He doesn’t want to be one of those parents anymore.

But, of course, the non-profit life is not utopic. There are places where a lack of funding is crippling. There are sometimes bad bosses, not to mention the fatigue that comes with trying to fix sprawling, societal problems like poverty, says Clement. “If you are always about the fight, if you are always talking about what is missing in the world, what is wrong with the world... you can get worn down.”

“It’s not like you’re going to come here and not have any of the challenges of the traditional world,” says Diorio. “You are going to have similar and many unique challenges. It is not like you’re going to come here and your breath is going to smell better and you’re going to sleep better.”

Diorio has friends who tease him about his benevolent efforts trying to “save the world.” How does he respond? “Well, I’m usually walking on water at that point, then I look at them and I say, ‘There are some worlds that aren’t savable,’” he jokes, before confessing his usual response is less dramatic. “I just laugh,” he says. “And we talk about our kids. Like everybody else.”

“I wanted to take my marketing experience and put it to work in an organization where I felt I could have the greatest impact”

—Matt Sepkowski



“The kids know everything and that wasn’t always true. I never talked about work before”

—Bryan Tenenhouse