



**BEING AN AMBASSADOR FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE:  
IN WORK, IN POLITICS, IN LIFE**

Remarks from Rob Wildeboer, December 1, 2015

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Distinguished Guests,

It is an honour and a pleasure to have been invited to be at tonight's Christmas banquet, hosted by the Christian Embassy. I have already had the privilege of speaking with a number of the people in the room, not just tonight but in previous opportunities to get together. Over the years I have had the pleasure of meeting with a number of ambassadors, through the Christian Embassy and through my work both in business and in public service, and it has always been a pleasure to work with both the elected politicians and members of our excellent civil service here in Ottawa. I have hosted, on plant tours and sometimes in my home, ambassadors from Romania, Austria, Nigeria, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Slovakia, Portugal and the Philippines, and it has been wonderful. You all do good work, and I am always impressed with the dedication with which you approach your task, and the good things that you have the opportunity to do.

## **WORK AND AMBASSADORSHIP**

Let's talk about work. Let me share the work that I have the privilege to do.

In my life, my work has always been based on building things, or rather helping people build things with hopefully some positive influence from me. Work is a passion and a hobby. It is an extension of the human spirit. It is a calling. It is a way in which we manifest ourselves, to the glory of our Creator and in the service of our fellow man or woman. It is about service. It is about the best in life. Work, in its proper context, is simply an extension of the best we have to give. That is what I believe. I believe that in our work we are ambassadors of what I believe to be true, and my words, my actions should reflect that. And, if work is fulfilling, it also becomes easier to do, like a hobby. We do spend a lot of time working, so I hope for you all that work is like a hobby to you.

With that philosophy in mind, I have had the pleasure to do a bunch of things in my life; as a matter of fact, sometimes I look at what I've done and where I've been and I wonder if I can ever make up my mind?

- I've had the pleasure of being a lawyer (I know that sounds like an oxymoron to many of you), but I liked it.
  - o I was a business lawyer. I had the privilege of helping people build things, finance ideas, growing businesses, and providing people fulfilling work
  - o After working in a big international firm, Stikeman Elliott, I had the privilege of starting my own firm. When asked "why are you doing this, leaving the security of a big firm?" – I said "I want to work with my friends, and help people build companies"
  - o And that's what we did. We had some great clients over the years, including RIM from its earliest days, who developed the blackberry. As a matter of

fact, I remember the discussion about what to call the device – Blueberry sounded too nice, raspberry sounded too tart, but Blackberry sounded pretty cool and was unique!

- I've had the pleasure of helping build a construction and infrastructure company, Aecon
  - Among other things, we have built a number of projects in Canada, such as the CN Tower, the Skydome, the 407, but also a number of international projects
    - The airport in Quito Ecuador
    - The Cross Israel Highway
    - Coming soon, the new Bermuda Airport
  - We had the pleasure of building really cool projects in some really great places. In our view our projects made life better for the people that could use our facilities.
- I've had the pleasure of working on a number of charitable and public policy endeavours
  - Including Edu Deo, a Christian organization that builds schools and trains teachers in places such as Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, south Sudan and the Congo
  - Or the Macdonald Laurier Institute, a fine non-partisan think tank here in Ottawa where I have been Chairman since inception. It is led by my friend Brian Lee Crowley, our mantra being there is no room for bad public policy here in Ottawa – or elsewhere for that matter
  - And I have been in Ottawa over the years advising on economic policy, science and technology and manufacturing.
  - In all these things, hopefully helping people do things in the right way, in a way that serves others and improves lives
- I have always found, especially in the counselling and public policy context, that if you are honest with your advice, in a nice way, and in a way that you try to help the other person do what they do better, you get listened to a lot more. It is way more effective than preaching, or arguing. Most of the people in this room are professional negotiators in a sense, so I know you get that, probably better than me.
- Some would say, this is a good resume. But I don't live for a resume. Frankly, at the end of the day a resume is meaningless. I would rather live in a sense for an obituary, that someday when I pass on it will be said of me that I tried to give the best that I had to give, that I treated people well with dignity and respect, and that I was a good

and faithful servant of my God. I don't live up to these standards every day, but I hope I try.

I happen to have the honour of being the Executive Chairman and a founder of Martinrea International Inc., and here I want to show you our principles of doing business.

But first, a little about the business we are in:

Martinrea is in the auto parts business. We make parts for cars and trucks.

So, what do we make:

- We make metal parts for vehicles, virtually anything metallic on the vehicle
  - o Engine cradles, cross members, roofs
  - o We are the second largest auto parts maker in North America in this space, with plants in Canada, the US and Mexico
- We make fluid systems for vehicles
  - o Fuel lines, brake lines and fuel fillers—where you put the gas nozzle when you put gas in your car
  - o We are now one of the largest in North America, with plants in Canada, the US, Mexico, Slovakia and China (I have met the Slovakian ambassador through the Christian Embassy and I must say your country is beautiful and our plant there is doing well!)
- We make aluminum parts for vehicles and engines
  - o Including engine blocks
  - o Including structural parts such as engine cradles, steering knuckles and control arms
  - o Our Martinrea Honsel group is located in Germany, Spain, Brazil, Mexico and now China
  - o We are the second largest manufacturer in our space in the world

Our largest customers are GM, Ford, FCA, Daimler, Jaguar Land Rover and Nissan, and we have many other customers too.

Our company has grown from a small enterprise that did no automotive business in 2001 to a company today with

- Close to 15,000 employees
- 44 plants in 8 countries on four continents

- Close to \$4 billion in revenues
- From a small company in Toronto to a worldwide company now with almost 80% of our revenues coming from outside Canada.

As a leader, I am, and I feel, personally responsible, along with the senior members of our team, for the wellbeing and welfare of our people. The key to our success as leaders, to my success as a leader, is whether our company is taking care of our people and their future.

I am an ambassador for what we do, to our people, to our customers, to our stakeholders, and to the governments of the places in which we do business.

As well, I feel Martinrea is an ambassador for Canada and our approach to our business. There is no doubt that in many places people know we are a Canadian company – and we started here, we have shareholders here, we have lenders here, we pay taxes here, and our head office is here. We do reflect our culture and belief systems.

But we are also passionate about being good local citizens, both in terms of country and community:

- In Mexico, all our plants have the Madonna in the lobby; we encourage local picnics and social events, we promote wherever possible our Mexican workers, so that, when you walk through a Martinrea plant in Mexico, it looks like a Mexican plant. And it is.
- In Germany, we act differently to reflect local culture in the right way. Germans are technical, orderly. They are very proud of their R and D capability, and they are great at it, so we have a technical centre there. But it is clear that we are German in Germany, and we have kept the Honsel name to show that
- In China, we are Chinese; in Brazil we are Brazilian; in Spain we are Spanish; in the US, we are American – and in the deep south we are different than in Kentucky and in the north we are different again.
- You should see the enthusiasm of our various plants during the World Cup!
- The key to corporate ambassadorship is to respect individual and local identity.

Let me go through our Vision, Mission and Principles with you. This is how we operate and how we will go forward.

Here is our Vision:

Our vision for the future is to be the best, preferred and most valued automotive parts supplier in the world in the products and services we provide our customers.

This is what we intend to be. Where we want to get to. We believe in this vision passionately. Vision, without passion, is merely hallucination.

Our Mission, which is what we do to become who we intend to be, is formulated in the following way:

Our Mission is to deliver:

- Outstanding quality products and services to our customers
- Meaningful opportunity, job satisfaction and job security to our people through competitiveness and prudent growth
- Superior long term investment returns to our stakeholders
- Positive contributions to our communities as good corporate citizens. We're ambassadors too.

In order to perform our mission and fulfill our vision, we have also developed, in conjunction with our people at the corporate level, in the groups and in the plants, the principles that will guide how we do business. We believe our success will ultimately be based on the application and execution of our guiding principles, applied with integrity, in all that we do. I firmly believe that if you lose the principles, and don't follow them, you lose your way. The people I have the pleasure to serve with at Martinrea feel the same way. At every offsite, and at every meeting of our business unit leaders and functional group leaders, we go over our principles and we are trying to live them, not just preach about them.

So, here is the list:

1. We make great, high quality products.
  - Nothing should detract from this, and if we don't we will not survive or be No. 1
  - That is what it is all about – not buying companies, not being the biggest, not being the cheapest, not being the fastest growing but being the best
  - Quality really is the basis of job security and opportunity for our people
  - We are good in many areas, great in some, but there is always room to improve.
2. Every plant/division must be a centre of excellence
  - Not a centre of adequacy, but excellence
  - Some of our plants are, we believe, the best in the world in what they do – Saltillo for fluids, Queretaro and Madrid for aluminum blocks and structures; some of our metallics plants consistently win supplier awards.
3. Be disciplined. Discipline is Key
  - Ownership implies discipline. Operational and financial

- Consistency and continuous improvement are the basis of manufacturing, but must be applied in a disciplined way. Once you do something right, you must have the discipline to always do it right and do it better.
  - It is fundamental to emphasize a culture of discipline
4. We attract, train and work with excellent people, and we get our people to perform well
- Only by training people and encouraging people to use that talent will we accomplish great things
  - We succeed or fail because of the people involved, doing the things we need them to do
5. We are a team
- Together everyone achieves more; Business is one of the ultimate team sports.
  - This does not mean we all say the same thing, and cannot provide constructive dissent
    - We need constructive criticism
    - Constructive dissent treats people with dignity and respect
  - We will make mistakes; and we have, but we can fix things together
  - Organizational charts and titles are nice, but mean little. Your title cannot foster ego. Your title does not equal your contribution. We are a team.
6. Challenges make us better
- Life isn't easy, get used to it – look at challenges the right way.
  - Pain is weakness leaving the body, like exercise
  - Competition is pressure, but makes us better
  - Complacency makes us lazy and unhealthy
  - But let's ensure the challenges are manageable, and capable of being met. Putting people into impossible situations is not a challenge, it is a mistake. Life should not be made harder due to lack of planning, teamwork and respect.
7. Think Different
- This is the Apple slogan, but true here too
  - The conventional wisdom, must be considered but not taken as gospel or for granted
    - Think about growth, new product areas – do we have to follow the trend, or make the trend
    - The conventional wisdom is often, maybe even generally, wrong or missing something
  - You never know what you can do unless you try. The world is changed by people doing what people thought they could not do. If you set limits on what you can do, you will probably not exceed them. In 2001, a lot of people told us we were crazy to think we could start and grow an auto parts company based in Canada. Now, 14 years later, a very short time in the life of a business, we are over \$3.5 billion with over 14,000 people in 8 countries on 4 Continents. Not so crazy.

## 8. Work hard, play hard

- Remember that we promote job satisfaction, a meaningful existence for our people at work
- Have fun, at every level of the organization
- Work is dignified if it is meaningful, respectful and fun
- But encourage home life and away time too. Our Company will be better off for it.

## 9. The Golden Rule – Show Dignity and Respect

- In our work, we serve others:
  - Our people
  - Our customers
  - Our owners
  - Our friends
  - Our communities
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- Showing a little respect and support goes a long way. Don't wait for it to give it
- It will be the bedrock of success going forward. We will be committed to creating and maintaining a culture that respects hard work, teamwork, commitment and treating people right.

## 10. Our leadership team has to drive these messages consistently and simply. Leadership means having the will to ensure we get the right things done the right way.

- 14,000 plus people rely on us to get it right. They deserve our best
- Leadership does not mean doing everyone's job. It means helping them do their job, without undue interference
- Keep it simple, be consistent.

And in all this, leadership has to act with integrity. If we strive to do the right thing, things will generally work out ok. I think that is and has to be our tone at the top. As a leader, you gotta love your people. You also to produce results. But I believe the two go together, to achieve long term success.

Let me go back to our 9th Principle a little more. People have said to me, "that principle sounds pretty religious". It is. The Golden Rule is a straight lift from the Bible in a number of places. They are the words of Jesus Christ, the Christ of Christmas. Love God, and Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbour, and so love is the fulfilment of the law.

But notwithstanding the fact that this is a Christian principle, it is universal. I understand some form of this rule is found in at least 8 religions. But still it is the most associated with Christianity. Is it not a wonderful principle for business? Is it not a wonderful way to succeed in business? Why would you not treat your employee the way you would want to be treated? Or your customer? Or the people who lend you money, or invest in your company? Or the person

who supplies you with goods? Or the local mayor or the local government who is trying to help you or, in turn, tax you or regulate you?

So, for me, this is the key principle of my approach to work, and to public service. It reflects my belief in Christ, the great ambassador of Christmas. It is easy to be a Christian in church, but if I cannot also live those principles at work, and be a Christian ambassador in what I do at work and elsewhere, I am a hypocrite, and should be viewed as such. I grew up in a Christian home; my parents, Dutch Calvinists who immigrated to this country after World War 2, have always been strong in the faith and I have had the privilege of growing up in a hardworking, immigrant community that built lives for themselves here in Canada after coming over by boat with nothing to start with, other than of course a strong faith, a strong work ethic and a tremendous country full of opportunity!

Even though I grew up in a Christian home, I had to embrace that faith as my own. I needed to come to a place in my life where I recognized that my faith in Jesus had to control my life and my conduct. And not just in my worship, but in all areas of my life, including my work, my politics, my hobby time, my family time.

I could not do this on my own and had to open myself up to submit myself to Christ as my Saviour.

Jesus is not just a good guy, a good teacher or a good role model, but He is my Redeemer. And my Redeemer lives, as the risen Christ, who has dominion over all aspects of life, including work and politics. Yes, I believe He is also in charge of what the ambassadors in this room do for a living!

And so, for me, the Golden Rule is not just a good rule for business - - it is something to live out fully on a daily basis. It gives me peace with God and with my neighbor. And it makes me happy in my work. I believe it is comforting for any one here who embraces Christ.

## **AMBASSADORS**

I would like to touch on the macro scene for a moment, reflecting on the fact this is a dinner of the Christian Embassy, and we have many ambassadors here, reflecting many countries and many backgrounds. Just as Martinrea, as I discussed, is a very international company reflecting many cultures and many backgrounds.

We live in a challenging world. As an international company, I spend a lot of time looking at and thinking about geopolitics and global economics. Our people deserve my best thoughts on this, as I am protecting their futures.

- How do we invest in a world with slower growth? I personally believe for our company North America is a great place to be, with a great future this century for the US, for Canada, and for Mexico

- How do we invest in China, a country with opportunities but that is seeing slower growth, a population that is growing older and a need to still bring a half billion people out of poverty – by the way, this is not to deny many tremendously positive developments
- How is Brazil doing, a country that despite its strong resource base, is facing challenges
- How is Europe doing, a continent with challenges of slow growth, an aging population, and now immigration.

Plus, the reality is, we are in a war against terrorism that we have to deal with in the right way.

Overall, I am not sure the world is any more challenging today than it has been in the past or will be in the future. We still see foreign policy as involving certain potentially conflicting moral imperatives: the desire to defend freedom and the need to co-exist with adversaries. Still, today has some challenges different than we have faced.

But I do believe that the Golden Rule is, once again, a place to start. The Golden Rule does not mean we roll over and don't protect our lives when we are at war. And we are at war, for example. Our actions have to be discerning. How would you want to be treated in dealing with these issues?

For the country ambassadors among us, I do hope that we in Canada treat you well, the way we would like you to treat us. And that the opposite is also true. The Golden Rule is I believe a wonderful basis for international relations also. Even in times of war.

## **A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE**

So let me end with a Christmas message. We don't like to talk of war. But the Christmas message is one of peace. I have talked about the Golden Rule, for business, for ambassadorship and for life. And I profess that it is a Christian rule for living. But Christ, the Christ of Christmas, I believe is the Prince of Peace. He has provided peace in my life, and I believe that through Him the world can truly experience true peace also. At Christmas time, the message sung by the angels was one of peace: Peace on Earth, and good will to man!

May we all have a blessed Christmas time, and have a blessed and peaceful 2016!

Thank you so much for your time this evening!