



**Remarks to the Seventeenth Luncheon for  
The Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Inductees**

**by**

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Thank you Rob. I'm honoured to be here today to participate in this celebration of the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Inductees. To Colette, Alan, David, and Jeffrey, my congratulations for receiving this well-deserved recognition.

I want to applaud the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons, which is helping to change the way Canadians think about physical disability. One of the biggest obstacles for people with disabilities has always been other people's perceptions – creating a Hall of Fame is a landmark project that drives awareness and understanding.

At RBC we are strongly committed to creating a more inclusive workplace for *all* our employees, including those with disabilities.

RBC is a values-led company, and diversity for growth and innovation is one of our five core values. It is a key pillar of our culture for several reasons:

- it helps to ensure a rewarding and enriching work environment for our employees
- it is critical to achieving superior business results. Our view is that, to serve our markets well, we must reflect our markets well. So, for us, diversity is not a stand-alone agenda, but an integral part of our business strategies and embedded in what we do and who we are
- and because it's not just the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do. It's in keeping with our Canadian values of respect and fairness and our belief in the importance of building civil societies.

Attracting, developing and retaining the best talent is essential to the success of any business. And for businesses to achieve our full potential, we need to create environments where everyone can reach their full potential and where the only limitations to career success are an individual's abilities and drive.

Yet, we know there are still barriers for persons with disabilities that can detract from our ability to create a truly diverse and inclusive workplace. Just like today's event helps to raise awareness, RBC too is working hard to raise awareness and create a better understanding of disability.

One thing is clear: there needs to be more dialogue around the contribution and value employees with disabilities bring to the workplace. With one in five Canadians projected to acquire a disability in their lifetime, we need to be innovative in how we serve and support the full participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Technology and medical advances and an aging Canadian population are only heightening this need - and the opportunity.

We have some proof that our work to build a more inclusive environment at RBC is making progress. In our 2010 Employee Survey, people with disabilities were just as positive as their colleagues without disabilities on the statement "all employees are treated with respect here," and are just as positive about achieving their long-term career objectives at RBC. One indication of that is in 2009, the number one reason employees with disabilities left RBC was retirement. In most people's minds, that is one of the best reasons to leave a company. This fact makes it clear that, at RBC, People with Disabilities are developing winning careers. If they experience barriers, we are working to overcome them with the support of their colleagues and the bank.

I would like to briefly share our approach to Diversity – specifically Persons With Disabilities – to build awareness about what we have done at RBC and what is possible when you work at it.

Our Diversity strategy is based on three key pillars: Talent and Workplace, Clients, and Communities. We set ambitious goals. We want to be a recognized leader in workforce diversity; to be the financial institution of choice for diverse clients; and, to help build healthy communities, which are increasingly diverse. This approach drives our thinking about the employees we hire and develop – our clients and how best to serve them – and the communities we support.

By using this approach, we have become increasingly diverse at all levels of the company and across many different groups such as Persons With Disabilities but also with women, visible minorities, Newcomers to Canada, Aboriginals, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered individuals and many others.

We have made progress in including Persons With Disabilities, but we have much further to go.

In the workplace, we have focused on recruitment – we offer dedicated staff to candidates who are disabled to increase their chances of success in the application process. We work with organizations like Career Edge; its Ability Edge internship program helps recent graduates with disabilities to obtain meaningful work experience. Since 1996, RBC has hired 150 Ability Edge interns as employees.

We also know that training managers in creating an inclusive environment is an important part of building a company where People With Disabilities can be successful.

We are also a leader in providing workplace accommodation, through partnerships with organizations like the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work. We have done over 1,000 workplace assessments over the past eight and a half years. This is more than providing accommodations – this is about enabling employee performance. Working together, we are enabling employees with disabilities by providing them with the tools and support they need to succeed and grow within the organization. And when they grow, our businesses grow as well.

Let me share an example of the impact our program has on the lives of employees and our business performance. We have an employee who has been with us since 1969. Due to a progressive disability, she has been the recipient of 13 assessments, including a number of renovations to her work space and surrounding areas. She has excelled as an employee and has far exceeded the requirements of the role. She has been an annual RBC performance winner – which is only for our top performers, and continues to be an outstanding contributor to RBC today.

Another employee, Jennison Asuncion, who has visual impairment, helps develop accessible solutions for RBC's employees and clients alike. He earned one of the top recognition spots in our company for his innovative work. At the same time, he was also recognized by the CNIB for his community work at a summer camp for people with vision loss.

Jennison epitomizes our belief that employees, clients and the community are all connected and approaching all three can be a powerful way to accelerate change.

RBC has an employee resource group called RBC REACH. The group's mandate is to raise awareness of PWD issues so that RBC can take positive steps for change and provide support to PWD for inclusion and engagement at RBC. This group provides a great forum for individuals with disabilities to share experiences and best practices, and provide and receive mentoring and support. In fact this resource group has grown from 20 to 140 employees this year - that's momentum. A member of our senior management team, Al Tinney, who is with us today, is the executive champion of this group.

We also partner on important research to identify ways to help employees with disabilities be successful in the corporate environment.

For clients – we have a comprehensive Accessibility website; Braille statements and audio ATMs. And in the community we sponsor events such as the Paralympics and today's luncheon.

At RBC, we believe Diversity is a journey. We are proud of our Persons With Disabilities representation. At RBC, the number of employees with disabilities has gone up 68 per cent from 2003, and more than doubled since 1987. All because together we are creating an environment where all employees can succeed.

While representation is necessary, it isn't sufficient; it must go hand in hand with inclusion. Inclusion is being valued, respected and supported — and being enabled to fully participate in the workplace – where every individual *can* achieve her or his full potential. Inclusion needs to be reflected in an organization's culture, practices and relationships. You could say that diversity is the mix; inclusion is getting the mix to work well together, and turning it into value for clients, employees and the organization.

Much of the discussion about Diversity focuses on differences. At RBC, we think about it in a slightly different way. We believe that to ensure diversity is a strength, we must first focus on the similarities that bind us, that unify us around common purpose and goals and make us proud to be part of our organization. We are committed to our client-focused vision and our values, and, we expect everyone to live our values in their everyday actions and decisions.

With that as the foundation, we can then put our diversity to work. We do this by embracing the differences our employees bring through their experiences, their knowledge and their perspectives — including those based on their abilities, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. We also value the different cultures across our many businesses and geographies. Our strength and success comes from how we work together, how we collaborate, how we use that mix to generate innovative solutions.

At the core of Diversity is the idea that we can all be valued – indeed *should* be valued for who we are and the experiences and insights we bring to the table that are uniquely ours. In the simplest terms it is what we can accomplish together when we are free to be ourselves and others accept us as so.

I believe that corporations must start to see diversity as not just an add-on or a business opportunity, but a path to excellence.... that embedding it in your culture will help you get the most out of the mix and that the benefits will flow when you get it right.

At RBC, we have learned that when diversity and inclusion are part of decision-making, we are better positioned to connect with our customers and provide more meaningful products and services, driving customer loyalty and an enhanced bottom line in return.

Meanwhile, ensuring that each and every promising employee has an opportunity to contribute can pay off exponentially by driving innovation and growth; strengthening our workforce and enhancing our profile with potential recruits — not to mention inspiring other employees to give their best.

And through in-kind support, mentoring, internship opportunities and financial donations, corporations have a strong role to play in supporting community-based initiatives that drive change. We can do this, and we will do this.

Let me suggest some other ways in which we can all drive change:

1. Many of you are leaders in your organization. CEOs, Business Heads, HR Heads. Be a visible leader in establishing a strategy for Persons With Disabilities, one that aligns with your business objectives. Then set goals and monitor progress and reward the right leadership behaviours and outcomes. I have been the Chair of RBC's Diversity Leadership Council since its inception, and I see it as one of the most important roles I play at RBC.
2. And, if you aren't in a formal leadership position – you can be a visible leader and champion. Persons With Disabilities. Talk about it within your organization and in your community. Get involved. Take small steps.
3. Formally or informally mentor a Person With Disability. Listen to their stories and challenges. Share your experiences and insights. Your genuine interest and support will build their spirit and optimism. It will give them the confidence to take that next step.
4. And finally, foster inclusiveness in your workplace. Encourage colleagues to share their ideas and their unique perspectives, and leverage the value in them.

On behalf of RBC I thank you for the important work you are doing to ensure that Persons With Disabilities are included in our workplaces, our marketplaces and our communities. We look forward to continuing our work to make RBC, and our society, a place where people with disabilities can feel valued, add value, and demonstrate their – and our – abilities.

Thank you.