

Smith

FALL 2023

A Little Mud is Good

Adam Bienenstock's
playgrounds take kids
back to nature

Workday Warrior

Author Ann Gomez
explains how to
get stuff done

Let's Make a Deal

Professor Shai Dubey
has a better way
to negotiate

SOCCKER STAR **DIANA MATHESON**

**IS CREATING CANADA'S FIRST PRO
WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE**



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FSC

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It only takes a minute.

Landed a new job or promotion, recently retired, walked down the aisle, welcomed a baby, made a big move, or enjoyed some exciting travels? Let your classmates (and us!) know what's new.



Submit your note at smithqueens.com/alumninotes



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DEAN'S MESSAGE

Making a difference

OVER THE LAST YEAR, you may have heard me speak about our work to develop a new strategic action plan for Smith. I have discussed the importance of this plan previously, in this column and at school and alumni events. I'm delighted to let you know that our new Strategic Action Plan has launched. It will guide the school for the next five years.

The plan is the result of many hours of work, debate, discussion and consultation with our faculty, staff, students and alumni. Thank you for supporting this process by contributing comments and thoughts to help us refine the strategy.

The plan features a new purpose statement and six strategic priorities for the school going forward. I encourage you to read more about our new plan at smithqueens.com/strategicplan.

While much has been done to get us to this point, we're really just at the beginning of the implementation process. Now, we will focus attention on aligning our activities, resources and energy to the fulfilment of these commitments.

One of the six priorities in our strategy is to "Be a positive force in our communities." The goal here is to increase Smith's positive impact on our external communities at the local, national and global levels.

I have said before that business schools can contribute to solving the world's biggest issues through research, partnerships and teaching. A big part of our impact is through you — the graduates who go out into the world and do good work that has a positive impact on your communities.

In this issue of *Smith Magazine*, you will see many examples of our alumni having such an impact. As leaders in their organizations, they are making a difference in the communities in which they operate. They include:

▪ Kayla Kingdon-Bebb, BCom'07, Artsci'07, is pushing for climate action, biodiversity protection and the rights of Indigenous peoples as chief executive of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in New Zealand.

▪ Soccer star Diana Matheson, EMBA'23, and Thomas Gilbert, EMBA'23, Artsci'15, are supporting the growth of women's professional sports with their launch of a professional women's soccer league in Canada.

▪ Adam Bienenstock, EMBA'01, is creating play structures that look like they belong in nature. A global leader in natural playgrounds, his goal is to help children spend more time outdoors — feeling, climbing, jumping, running and discovering nature.

▪ Alain Mootoo, MMIE'18, came to Canada for a better life. Now he's making a difference by empowering society's overlooked and marginalized through his work with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation.

On another note, I would like to highlight Mike Quinn, BCom'88, and his wife, Francisca Quinn, who are helping the next generation of business leaders understand sustainable development concepts and climate change. Their \$2.5-million donation established the Quinn Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Professorship at Smith, a role that will lead the development of the ESG curriculum across Smith programs.

I'm very proud to share these stories of Smith alumni who are helping to make the world a better place.

Stay in touch!

Wanda M. Costen, PhD
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ONE MORE THING...

I firmly believe business schools should get involved in their local communities. With that in mind, 75 Smith staff and faculty volunteered in our communities this summer. Teams of Kingston staff supported the United Way's Day of Caring, which included not-for-profits Interval House, Kingston Home Base Housing, Journey House and Elizabeth Fry. Tasks ranged from gardening to painting, staining, building a walkway and more. The SmithToronto team helped clean up a park on Toronto's Don River. It was great to see everyone coming together for a great cause!



NEW

Smith Strategic Plan

At **Smith School of Business** our role is to develop the people, research, and insights that drive best business practices so organizations can thrive and benefit society.

We're proud to share the new Smith School of Business Strategic Plan. It will guide our efforts over for the next five years and establish a strong foundation for the years that follow.



smithqueens.com/strategicplan



SmithHQ

SCHOOL NEWS • PROFESSORS • STUDENTS • CLASSROOM

New digs!

Over the Labour Day weekend, Queen's University welcomed more than 4,500 incoming undergraduate students to campus during the annual Move-In Day. While first-year students were settling into residence, many returning students — like second-year Commerce students (from left) **ALIZA SHOAIB**, **CATHERINE ZHANG** and **MONICA TAYLOR** — were getting keys to their new off-campus pads.



David Sinkinson (left) and his brother Chris created AppArmor, a mobile safety app



Paying it forward

The Smith annual program that supports new graduates in their entrepreneurial pursuits has added a new donor.

DAVID SINKINSON, MBA'13, Artsci'11, and his brother **CHRIS SINKINSON, MBA'11**, Artsci'02, are sponsoring a \$15,000 Dare to Dream award.

Run by Smith's Centre for Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Social Impact, the corporate and alumni-funded Dare to Dream program provides capital and resources to help Smith graduates transform their ideas into successful ventures.

The Sinkinson brothers were the recipients of a Dare to Dream award in 2013 that was funded by **DANY BATTAT, BCom'78**, and the late **GIA STEFFENSEN, BCom'78**. The \$15,000 they received provided an early boost for their business, AppArmor. The custom mobile safety app developer was bought in 2022

by a U.S. competitor that in turn was bought by Motorola.

"I didn't imagine that in 10 years we were going to have the success that we had," says Chris, adding that while seemingly a small amount of money in the grand scheme of things, the Dare to Dream award he and his brother received was significant to the company's upward trajectory. "In reflecting on what our priorities are going to be now, there is some element of paying it forward and giving others the opportunity that we had."

The first to receive that opportunity is **KARTIK BALASUNDARAM, MMIE'23**, for his dental app SnapSmile, which helps people manage their dental health and lets dental clinics stay engaged with their patients.

"This grant is going to help us get going at lightspeed," Balasundaram says. "We can use this funding to make a short-term hire to build out the newest version of our product to scale to thousands of dental clinics."

Smith sets the foundation of its future

After more than 18 months of work, debate, discussion and consultation conducted with faculty, staff, students and alumni, Smith has launched a new strategic plan.

The new strategy outlines six priorities that will guide the business school over the next five years. They are:

- Preparing current and future graduates to solve big challenges;
- Ensuring an inclusive student experience;
- Being a positive force in our communities;
- Supporting a vibrant and productive research culture;
- Changing the world with our knowledge;

- Inspiring and supporting our people.

"These priorities are well-aligned with the evolving world in which business schools operate and the demands and expectations of the marketplace and our students," explains Dean **WANDA COSTEN**, adding that they serve to set a broad direction for the school's activities. "Our annual operational planning process will define what we do in any given year to best advance towards these goals. We will report our progress each year."

Though much work has been done to get to this point, the launch of the Smith Strategic Plan marks another beginning: its implementation. In the coming months, the school's leadership team will be focused on aligning the school's activities, resources and culture to the fulfilment of these commitments.

"It takes time to transition from words in a document to a living strategy that is embedded in our thinking and our work," Costen notes.

Read the complete strategic plan at smithqueens.com/strategicplan.

Professor named to hall of fame

As a Smith professor from 1993 to 2020, **DANIEL THORNTON** taught many students the ins and outs of financial accounting. But his influence went well beyond the classroom, to the highest levels of research, industry and government.

Thornton's contributions were recently recognized when he was inducted into the Canadian Accounting Hall of Fame. In a ceremony in June, the hall noted his

accomplishments. By the numbers, they included 51 published articles in refereed journals (several winning best paper awards); 38 PhD students supervised; and 20 expert-witness appearances under oath in U.S. and Canadian courts. Thornton also sat on standard-setting bodies, edited journals, volunteered with industry groups and worked with the Department of Justice and nearly all of Canada's top law firms on accounting issues.

Notably, in 2000, Thornton was asked to serve as a Professional Accounting Fellow at the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C. His arrival couldn't have come at a better time. The dot-com bubble was bursting and a series of late '90s derivative-induced bankruptcies was fresh in regulators' minds. Thornton was one of the few accountants who grasped

derivatives — a financial contract whose risks didn't appear on balance sheets. Over the next year, he taught hundreds of SEC staff about derivatives.

Then, when Enron went bankrupt, in 2001, Thornton appeared before the Senate banking committee in Ottawa where he described Enron's collapse as "a perfect storm" of risk-taking and governance failure. When it came time to issue their findings, the senators remembered his words; they titled their report "Navigating Through the Perfect Storm."

Now an Emeritus Professor of Financial Accounting at Smith, Thornton says that throughout his career he strived to make the financial industry, accountants and government understand the value of academic research.

In his speech during the Hall of Fame ceremony, Thornton said he enjoyed

every minute of his career. That alone, he added, "has been more than adequate to reward any contributions I've made to the profession."

Promoting responsible leadership

Can businesses help make society and the planet better? Members of the Council on Business & Society (CoBS) believe it can.

Earlier this year, Smith joined this alliance of leading international business schools that are using their collective reach to create and share knowledge on issues facing our world with current and future leaders who can help solve them.

CoBS produces a variety of editorial resources, from an online thought leadership platform and e-magazine to virtual master classes. All feature practical research and perspectives on the

intersection of business and society.

CoBS not only relies on the expertise of partner-school faculty and corporate experts but students too. Recently, articles written by two Smith Commerce students — **MARLA MacINNIS, BCom'23**, and **BRIANNA CAIRNS, BCom'23** — were featured as part of the council's annual corporate social responsibility article competition alongside faculty research in CoBS' *Global Voice* magazine.

MacInnis's article, "The illusion of inclusion: How artificial intelligence can challenge the 'business case' for diversity," explores how organizations can use AI to support their diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. Cairns also examined AI in her article, "ChatGPT: The biggest disruptor to education since the calculator," diving into the risks and opportunities that the chatbot presents to academia. Read their perspectives in the June issue of *Global Voice* at council-business-society.org.

Ring the bell

In August, the business school welcomed a delegation from international partner Lagos Business School (LBS) for a five-day study tour that included a mix of classes, corporate visits and cultural experiences. One of those visits was to the Toronto Stock Exchange, where LBS Dean Chris Ogbechie, the Nigerian High Commissioner to Canada, Ade Asekun, and the delegation had the honour of ringing the bell and opening the day's trading.



Raga Gopalakrishnan studies how managers deal with customer lineups



FACULTY

The science of strategy

Raga Gopalakrishnan uses mathematical modelling to make sense of the world around us

BY REBECCA HARRIS

THE FIRST TIME RAGA GOPALAKRISHNAN taught math it was to an audience of no one. That's because he was just a boy in the backyard of his home in Chennai, India, teaching his favourite subject to an imaginary class. He had pestered his parents to have a blackboard painted on a portion of a wall, and his mother — a schoolteacher — had brought home chalk.

"At a young age, I observed my mom marking papers and drawing up lesson plans," recalls the assistant professor of operations management who joined Smith in 2019. "It kindled a lot of curiosity and my passion for teaching. I was also drawn to math from a young age and research was very appealing to me."

Gopalakrishnan went on to study computer science and engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras and then completed his master's and PhD in computer science at the California Institute of Technology. During his studies, the concept of game theory caught his attention "because it involves multiple layers of anticipating what your opponents are trying to do to arrive at the best possible winning strategy," he says.

An early supervisor and a collaborator sparked another area of interest: queueing theory, or the mathematical study of waiting in lines. Today, his research partly focuses on how customers, servers and managers deal with queues, which can then help practitioners (in business management, for example) provide targeted recommendations to organizations.

"It's a combination of queueing theory and game theory, and that combination turned out to be the sweet spot that I was looking for," says Gopalakrishnan, whose latest research looks

at how server work speed is affected by managerial decisions. "I felt that exploring the field of queueing games might allow me to find more applications for my work. I wanted to move in a direction that was motivated by problems encountered in real life."

Why is queueing a problem? Gopalakrishnan says the negative consequences can range from "something trivial like getting annoyed waiting in line at Starbucks, to 'I die because I'm waiting for surgery' because there's a shortage of resources in health care. So, long wait times might just be catastrophic." As a theoretical researcher, he adds, "I view my work as contributing to an important pillar of strategic managerial thinking even though it doesn't directly tell managers exactly what they must do in those situations."

When he's not doing research or teaching, Gopalakrishnan also enjoys "recreational math", which includes learning fun facts about math. "There is a cliché that math is boring, but there are often quirky little stories behind many mathematical discoveries," he says.

But his life is not all math. Gopalakrishnan is keen to get back to long-distance running, a hobby that fell by the wayside in the pandemic. He also loves to travel and often combines it with his love of movies and television. On a recent vacation, Gopalakrishnan explored various *Harry Potter* filming locations across England and Wales. His most memorable trip came in 2016, when he toured the islands of Hawaii. "I'm a big fan of *Lost*, so I went to a lot of locations where they filmed the show," he says. "They were the best two weeks of my life." ■

STUDENTS

He's got game

Tyler Nother's hockey career ended with a championship. Now he has a new role in the sport

BY **EDDIE DANIELS**

TYLER NOTHER IS FAMILIAR with the dance between agent and athlete.

Once a teenage hockey player dreaming of a lucrative future in the sport, he has sat across from agents, visualizing a tantalizing professional career.

Years later, Nother, MBA'24, GDB'22, Artsci'22, is indeed on his way to a successful career in hockey. It won't involve lacing up skates or meting out body-checks though.

Soon, Nother will be the agent seated before hockey players and their families, as a player agent with Newport Sports Management, an agency with more than 125 National Hockey League clients.

"I wasn't the player that went on

to make millions of dollars playing professional hockey," says Nother, who began the sport as a four-year-old in Orangeville, Ont. "I was somebody who had to work hard to achieve what I was able to do in hockey."

Nother's career in the Ontario Hockey League spanned 159 games as a defenceman with the London Knights (2014-16) and Windsor Spitfires (2016-17). His final season, in 2017, ended with a Memorial Cup championship. His experience building relationships on the ice, in the locker room and outside of the arena will come in handy when he begins recruiting Ontario-based players for the largest talent agency in hockey. The Mississauga, Ont.-based company has a cadre of high, first-round NHL entry draft picks, including the most recent No. 1 pick, Connor Bedard, selected by the Chicago Blackhawks in June.

Just as Bedard wows on the ice, Nother has not gone unnoticed at Smith. Full-time MBA program director **MATTHEW REESOR**, Artsci'96, says Nother has the ability to engender feelings of warmth in those with whom he communicates while projecting quiet confidence.

"He will be an excellent sports agent



not just because of his academic business training and his personal experiences as a high-level athlete," Reesor says. "He will be an excellent sports agent because he understands how to establish trust and credibility with those around him."

No matter the setting — on ice or in the boardroom — trust and credibility are championship-level attributes. ■

CENTRES

PROFIT AND PURPOSE

Two Smith centres look to combine their impact in the economy

IN THE 2019 BOOK *The Prosperity Paradox*, Harvard professor Clayton Christensen and colleagues explored the curious trifecta of innovation, entrepreneurship and impact. When these three elements collide, 1+1+1 no longer equals three, or even four . . . but zooms to a game-changing 10. The result: economies grow, societies transform and lives improve.

Christensen's Exhibit A's included the Singer sewing machine company, whose innovations lifted impoverished Americans in the 1800s; and Mo Ibrahim's cellphone network, Celtel, which brought the benefits of mobile and easy tech to millions in Africa earlier this century.

There's a strong argument that a savvy combination of innovation, entrepreneurship and impact is the future of business success. And it's with that idea in mind that two longstanding Smith centres joined forces.

In September, the Centre for Social Impact and the Centre for

Business Venturing became the Centre for Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Social Impact (CEISI). The merger addresses the fact that, today, social impact plays a vital role in the mission of companies big and small.

"Businesses are thinking beyond shareholder return and understanding that they have an important part to play in prosperity writ large," says **ELSPETH MURRAY, MBA'87**, Artsci'85, professor of strategy and entrepreneurship and the new centre's director.

Among the centre's goals: support new venture success; build innovation capabilities in people and organizations; and foster research, education and community engagement on responsible leadership and social impact. Several initiatives are in the works, including the creation of a social impact fund to support startups and education for social impact investors. CEISI is also looking to develop a secondment program in which corporate Canada employees and students work with Indigenous communities to advance local Indigenous projects.

The new centre is timely. Many students who start companies today add a social purpose to their new venture. "In a world of ESG and SDG, the path to prosperity is one of entrepreneurship and innovation through social impact," Murray says. "Our students want it and society needs it." ■



PROGRAMS

“THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN SPEAKING”

A familiar face takes the yoke of Smith’s MMIE program

A NEW PILOT IS CHARTING THE COURSE of Smith’s Master of Management Innovation & Entrepreneurship (MMIE) program.

On July 1, **PETER GALLANT**, BSc(Eng)’91, MSc’93, PhD’01, began a one-year term as the program’s director, taking over from **NUSA FAIN**, who will continue to teach entrepreneurship and new-venture creation courses at Smith.

Gallant has taught at Queen’s in one capacity or another since 1995 — first as an academic assistant in the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering. He joined Smith in 2010 and has taught in the MMIE program since its launch in 2015. He became a continuing adjunct assistant professor in 2018.

“I have seen the program grow not only in terms of reputation and popularity, but also in terms of the unique expertise of the teaching team, the novel program structure and world-class individual and team coaching and mentoring models,” Gallant says. “These make MMIE one of the leading programs

for developing the next generation of entrepreneurs, corporate and social innovators.”

Outside the classroom, Gallant ran his own company and was CEO of Ontario’s Water Technology Acceleration Project. He consults, coaches and mentors entrepreneurs. In his spare time, he loves to fly. He’s been a licensed private pilot since 1997. “We lived near Pearson Airport in Toronto when I was growing up, so going to watch airplanes take off and land was a frequent weekend activity. I also often built model planes, so learning to fly them was a logical extension of my interest.”

Stepping into the cockpit of the MMIE, Gallant says igniting student engagement is his top priority. “While student engagement in general has been a challenge for universities in the return to in-person after Covid, it is so fundamental to the success of social and corporate innovators and entrepreneurs and is a key element of the MMIE journey and experience.” ■

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Bridging the gap

Smith students connect theory with real-world experiences

CONNECTING STUDENTS’ classroom learnings with practical educational opportunities is a huge part of the Smith experience. From internships to capstone projects and living cases, there are ample ways for students to get ready for the job market.

Experiential learning opportunities

are also a way for alumni to connect with the school and benefit from the skills and fresh ideas of student talent.

LAUREN THIBODEAU, BCom’93, has been tapping the Smith Commerce program for the past three years to help grow her company, SaaSCan, which provides research and advisory services to Canadian Software as a Service (SaaS) companies. “The SaaS ecosystem in Canada is large and growing, accounting for about half of the \$9.4 billion invested by VCs in Canadian companies in 2022. It’s important for Smith grads who are interested in tech to be knowledgeable about this landscape,” she says.

Recently, **AMY ZHU, BCom’25**, worked with Thibodeau to create a SaaS map of Canada, a centralized resource featuring geographic and demographic data, standout company examples and accel-

erator and incubator resources. **KAMAL-DEEP DHILLON, BCom’25**, took this research one step further and worked on an AI layer for the SaaS map that startups can use to support their growth.

“Working with SaaSCan and Lauren has been an incredible learning experience. I have relished the creative freedom to shape our report section, which has enabled me to foster new skills and refine existing ones,” Dhillon says.

Thibodeau has had six Commerce students work with her at SaaSCan since launching the company in the pandemic. She recently caught up with them during a virtual SaaSCan Smith alumni reunion. “I learn as much or more from [students] as they from me — from new tech, to fresh ways of problem solving, to creative approaches I’d never think of,” Thibodeau says. ■

Fit for the top

Smith program helps students reach their full potential

MANY OF YOU NO DOUBT have fond memories of navigating the Kingston campus and participating in challenges and activities as part of the Smith Challenge. That fun exercise is one way Smith's Fit to Lead (FTL) program is fostering team-building, collaboration and critical thinking skills.

We all know that personal well-being plays a pivotal role in our success individually and as part of a team, whether in the

classroom, the boardroom or everyday life. That's why FTL also integrates mental, physical and nutritional components into its offerings.

Want to reap the benefits of this powerful program at home? Here, FTL team members Shane Lakins, Faizan Imtiaz and Tyler Fedak share some advice and examples to support your well-being efforts.

NUTRITIONAL PERFORMANCE



"We believe strongly that there are not good and bad foods, but there are choices, and some choices are more

nutritious than others. For example, an apple is a more nutritious choice than an apple fritter. Neither are bad, but one certainly contains more health benefits," says Lakins. "Speaking of apples, give these apple nachos a try!"

Ingredients:

4 apples (preferably a variety that is more sweet than tart)

- Core and thinly slice (skin on or off, your choice)

60ml or ¼ cup each of the following:

- Almond butter
- Honey (liquid is easier)
- Coconut flakes
- Granola
- Chocolate chips (optional but very tasty)

A pinch of cinnamon to your taste

Instructions: Arrange the apples randomly on a plate (similar to how you would with nachos). Stir almond butter and honey together and warm in the microwave for 10-20 seconds. Drizzle the mixture over the apples and top with the remaining ingredients.

MENTAL PERFORMANCE



When we practise mindfulness during regular everyday activities, our brain learns to internalize this state and, in turn, it becomes significantly easier to focus and concentrate during more important tasks. Five to 10 minutes per day can be enough to make significant gains.

Identify everyday tasks that you do on autopilot and try to enhance mindfulness during those activities. "One of the most effective ways of doing this is by turning the volume up on our five senses, paying deeper attention to what we see, hear, feel, smell and taste during the activity," says FTL performance coach Faizan Imtiaz, MSc'13, PhD'18.

Take the simple task of brushing your teeth as an example. Instead of letting your mind wander to your to-do list for the day, bring it back to the task at hand. What colour is the toothpaste? How does it taste and smell? How do the bristles feel on your teeth and gums? What do you hear (the faucet dripping, a bird chirping outside the window, the coffee pot brewing)?

"The more senses that are involved, the more vivid and effective the mindful practice," Imtiaz explains. "Activities that our participants find easiest to do this with include mindful eating, driving, walking/exercising and spending time with loved ones without distractions such as technology."

PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE



Regular physical activity plays a key role in keeping our mind and body healthy. There are plenty of ways to incorporate activity into our daily lives. Tabata — a form of high-intensity interval training — is one of them.

Check out this 30-minute workout from FTL fitness co-ordinator and coach, Tyler Fedak, Artsci'22. It features four exercise pairs. Every exercise in a superset is performed for 20 seconds each followed by a 10-second rest. Perform each set four times. After the fourth set, take a one-minute rest and move on to the next superset.

Workout description:

Set 1: Frog squat/straight arm plank
Set 2: Hip hinge/wide grip pushup
Set 3: Side to side/side plank twist
Set 4: Two-way jump squat/inchworm with plank taps

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



"One of the best ways to learn is through real-life experience and activities that leave a lasting impression," says Lakins. Just like the Smith Challenge builds teamwork, critical thinking and camaraderie, similar results can be achieved with the activities below. Try one out with your friends, family or colleagues.

1. Escape room
2. Improv class
3. Tree-top trekking

Insight

FACULTY RESEARCH • IDEAS • ALUMNI EXPERTS • ADVICE



“So, tell me about yourself”

Every job interviewer asks this one question, and most of us mess up the answer. Here’s how to get it right

BY MATTHEW REESOR, Artsci’96

IT’S 8:45 ON A MONDAY MORNING. You arrive at a downtown office tower for a final-round job interview with your dream employer. Your heart is racing. You feel a nervous anticipation in the pit of your stomach. You remind yourself that this energy is useful. It shows excitement rather than fear.

After all, you’ve prepared for this moment. For months you’ve pored over the company’s website, annual reports and research papers. You’ve had numerous conversations with folks at various levels in the organization. You feel confident that the company culture is a perfect match. Plus, you’ve worked with a career coach to ensure your knowledge and skills can be clearly articulated. And yet, it’s the first interview question that causes you the most concern . . .

“Please take a few moments to tell us a little bit about yourself.”

On the surface, it appears to be an easy question. After all, the subject is one you should be most familiar with: You! It’s not a question that demands a specific right answer and you don’t need to cite sources to back up your points. But it is for precisely these reasons that “Tell me about yourself” (or TMAY) causes so much anxiety. Where do you start? What do you focus on? What do you leave out?

If you’re like most interviewees, you’ll probably ramble for a few minutes, touching on everything from your hometown to disjointed resumé points. In other words, you’ll miss the perfect opportunity to start your interview off on the right foot. Let me explain.

First impressions

Typically, TMAY kicks off the formal part of an interview. As such, it is key in setting the tone and establishing rapport between you and the interview panel.

Behavioural psychology research has repeatedly demonstrated that social judgment (the opinions and thoughts that we form about other human beings) occurs within seconds of meeting someone. So how you answer the first interview question matters.

Research also shows warmth and competency to be the two most important dimensions underlying social judgment. While interviewers might think they are making decisions based on logic alone, feelings and emotions play just as big a role. So, while there may not be any right or wrong answer to TMAY, your response, and the way you deliver it, will go a long way to determining how interviewers feel about your character (warmth) and your skills and abilities (competence).

Knowing this should give you the confidence to present and frame your answer effectively. Think less about all the details of your background that you want to share (such as schooling, professional experience and values)

and more about how you can establish warm relations with the interview panel while simultaneously demonstrating competence.

The former comes down to things like dress, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, how you structure content, word choice and pacing. The best way to understand these aspects of your communication style is to ask trusted colleagues and friends for feedback and to analyze yourself on video.

Yes, you read that right. Record yourself answering the question: *“Please take a few moments to tell us a little bit about yourself.”* Watch it back. Critique yourself (with grace). And try again. Yes, this can be a painful process. However, analyzing their video recordings is one of the quickest and most effective ways I’ve seen students and professionals improve their communications skills.

As for competence, this is a matter

of understanding exactly what attributes the organization is looking for and incorporating clear examples of how your education and experience demonstrate them. This is where your company research and networking before the interview are crucial.

If, for example, your investigation reveals that the role you’re after prioritizes the ability to establish strong relationships with clients, combined with advanced data analysis skills, your TMAY should focus on illustrating your competence in these areas.

Positive emotions

But what should you actually say? Tell a story! Effective use of narrative plays a huge role in how engaging you are and whether the interview panel will remember you. An open-ended question like TMAY is the perfect opportunity to direct the conversation toward your strengths while making real, human connections.

You have no doubt been advised to include clear, succinct examples to back up your claims during interviews. To ace TMAY, you need to go one step further. Craft a short story that not only draws from your unique

life experiences but also elicits positive emotions in the heads and hearts of the interview panel. Keep your audience in mind.

On the surface, “Tell me about yourself” seems like an impossibly vague question. But it’s actually the perfect opportunity to show how aligned your skill set is with the competencies being sought for the role. If you can simultaneously deliver your answer in such a way that the panel feels genuine warmth towards you as a person, you’ll be off to a great start and well on your way to landing the job of your dreams. ■



Matthew Reesor is the director of the Full-time MBA program and an adjunct lecturer of communications at Smith.

How to run a team debrief

Once a work project is done, many who were involved just want to move on. Big mistake. Teams that had problems need to debrief so they can right the ship and not repeat mistakes. High-performing teams need to identify why their last project worked. Here, **DIANA DRURY**, Artsci’83, Ed’84, director of team and executive coaching for Smith’s MBA and master’s programs, explains five steps to a winning team debrief.



1. Go around the room and let every teammate bring forward something that, in their opinion, worked during the project’s execution. Don’t let teammates challenge one another’s contributions. “Instead, focus on generating a long list of things that went well,” Drury says.

2. Next, review all the positive inputs and vote on your team’s Top 3 things that went well. “The big question is: What’s working for us? That’s how you generate consensus,” Drury says.

3. Repeat the same process for a list of things that didn’t work. Again, there’s no discussion or debate during this process. Everyone simply contributes what they feel could have been better.

4. Now, vote to rank the Top 3 things that didn’t work. The goal: to cut them from your process. “It’s not about placing blame,” says Drury. “Remember, you’re a team.”

5. Create a lessons-learned file of what worked and didn’t. That determines what your team is going to do differently moving forward and, Drury says, becomes the basis for your next team project.

THE REAL ART OF THE DEAL

Professor Shai Dubey, Law '94, explains why negotiation isn't the same as bargaining and why it's a skill we can all use

BY ROBERT GERLSBECK

WE MAY NOT REALIZE IT, but we're negotiating every day. It could be in the boardroom with colleagues and customers or in the kitchen with family. To many, it's a zero-sum game. A winner and a loser. But Shai Dubey is more optimistic. A lawyer and associate professor who teaches negotiation to students at Smith and Queen's Law (and to professionals via Queen's Executive Education), Dubey believes that negotiation knowledge can improve our relationships, professionally and otherwise. In conversation with managing editor Robert Gerlsbeck, he explains why, and what the best negotiators get right.

Robert Gerlsbeck: How do you define a negotiation that has worked?

SHAI DUBEY: In my experience, a successful negotiation is when the parties leave the table getting what they both wanted. They have a strong relationship and they're looking forward to working more with each other.

What's a common mistake people make around the table?

We tend to go into a negotiation with some fear because there's an asymmetry of information. We don't know what the other side wants and then we make assumptions as to what they want. We hear what we want to hear rather than listening to what they are really looking for. Then we try to persuade them based on how we see the world, not how *they* see the world.

So does good negotiating start with listening?

Yes. We feel that to persuade somebody, we need to talk more. All the research shows that the best negotiators, the best persuaders, listen 63 per cent of the time. When you're listening, when you're actually hearing what the other person is saying, you have to ask followup and clarification questions — and that allows you to understand the other person. As a negotiator, you should always be asking questions because without questions you never know what the other party wants. The best negotiator is somebody who listens, who has empathy and who understands relationships are important.

What role does preparation play?

It is probably the most critical thing. If you go into a negotiation without properly preparing first, you're not going to do well at all. So much information can be flying at you during a negotiation, and you don't know what the other side is going to bring to the table. Think about the

times when you have been under stress and had information overload. That's the situation you will find yourself in.

Preparation does several things: One, you will know what it is you want. Two, you can prepare for what the other side might want. But more importantly, it gets you to start asking questions for the information you don't know. So rather than having to think on the fly under pressure, you have a list of questions ready to ask and then you can build on that.

Going back and forth with someone else can be emotional. Should we strive to eliminate our emotions entirely?

We like to think that we can stay rational when we're dealing with other people. But we are all human beings. Before you show up to a negotiation, you may have had a disagreement with your spouse, your child might be sick, you might have got into a traffic jam or maybe your boss told you to do something that you didn't want to do. Maybe somebody on the other side of the table makes a comment that triggers something in you. When that happens, human psychology and physiology cause our thinking brain to shut down and we go to our primitive brain. We're no longer rational at that point.

Now, we can't get rid of our emotions. But we can try to understand what our triggers are — because we all have them. If we can recognize when somebody says something that triggers us, we will know to take a deep breath and step back. And

“What happens when people talk is they often walk themselves out of the confrontation. Then you can really understand the issue...”

some people are very good at poking and finding weaknesses in others. But if you react and let your emotions get away from you, in my experience you've probably lost that negotiation.

What strategies can turn a confrontational negotiation into a collaborative one?

When somebody is confrontational, first of all, you have to realize there's probably something else going on. It could be their emotions, it could be their style, it could be out of fear. But remember: we can choose how we react. If we respond by attacking back, then we're both going to be in attack mode, and that's probably not going to be very constructive.

Usually, when somebody is confrontational, they're afraid of something or they have some pressure on them. The best thing you can do, again, is ask questions and get them to talk. What happens when people talk is they often walk themselves out of the confrontation. Then you can really understand the issue that's driving their behaviour and address it. People want to be heard, not just listened to, but really heard. If you can be empathetic, you've changed the whole game.

Isn't negotiating often simply about trying to get the best deal for my side?

Most people view negotiation as pure bargaining, a fixed pie bias where each party looks to get the biggest piece of the pie. This type of negotiation is appropriate in certain circumstances when money is the only issue. But I would say that in 95 per cent of cases, both in our personal lives and in our business lives, we don't need to bargain because the parties often do not want the same thing. Money is really a scoring system and not always the true measure of what people need. If we step back and really understand what each party wants, then we can build something that is collaborative and allows everybody to have their interests met.

How important is it for an organization's managers to be skilled negotiators?

I would say that negotiating isn't just an important skill for managers. It's an important skill for everyone. Yes, it's useful from a business standpoint, but if you have a spouse, a partner, kids, friends and you have a place of work, you are negotiating every single day. What if you can use your negotiation skills to really empathize with the people you deal with in your daily life and make your relationships better?

The world is more confrontational today. It's more divided. And yet, when we think about it, we all want the same things: we want a better life for ourselves and for our families; we want to be successful. When we understand negotiations, we start to see how we can bring people together, to start talking rather than attacking and how we can build a better world rather than ripping it apart. ■



Who has the time?

Ann Gomez, MBA'00, on how to be more productive at work and have a life outside the office, too

BY REBECCA HARRIS

WHILE WORKING IN management consulting, Ann Gomez noticed some people who handled heavy workloads *and* had great personal lives. They socialized! They slept! Others struggled to keep up, despite working all hours. Her realization provided newfound purpose. In 2004, she founded Clear Concept Inc., a training organization that helps people thrive at work. Last year, Gomez wrote a book called *Workday Warrior: A Proven Path to Reclaiming Your Time* (Dundurn Press). In conversation with contributor Rebecca Harris, she talks about barriers to productivity and how people can work smarter, not harder.

Rebecca Harris: How do you define productivity?

ANN GOMEZ: For me personally, productivity is about making time for what we value most. If we don't spend enough time on what we value most, we don't feel we're making the most of our time.



What's the goal of being more productive?

Productivity is all about getting the results we want. It's not about the number of hours we log or the number of things we cross off our list. It's not about busy work. And that's true in both our work life and personal life. In my personal life, for example, I would like to digitize the decades of old family photos I have inherited, and I'd like to do that in a very efficient and effective way. The goal is not to spend night after night digitizing photos. The goal is to achieve a solid result: having a nicely organized collection of family photos from over the years, without this project absorbing every evening.

What stops people from being productive at work?

It comes down to three challenges. One is people try to do too much at the same time. So, they dilute their efforts, which leads to working around the clock, or the nagging feeling that they should be working around the clock. Two, people are too flexible with their time, so they're pulled here and there and are not able to protect sufficient time for what's most important. Three, a lot of us — me included, if I'm not careful — tend to complicate their work. When we strip away the complication and simplify, we create better results.

Flexibility is a buzzword today. What's the case for being more structured?

I used to think flexibility was the Holy Grail. That's why we worked so hard: to be able to take the time off that we want and decide what we want to focus on. In all those cases, flexibility is great. But, just like most things in life, too much of a good thing is a challenge. The same is true with flexibility. For example, arguably all of us could go to the gym at any time, but routines help us build a consistent fitness habit and allow us to prioritize this time.

This is equally true in our work life. You might feel you don't get enough time for your most important goals because so many other things get in the way. And so, after studying the world's most productive people, the solution I recommend is to pay yourself first by blocking

time for your priorities before other tasks get in the way. Paying yourself first is a familiar financial concept that applies equally well to your most precious resource — your time.

What are some practical ways to carve out that time?

A lot of people have days filled with meetings, collaborative work and emails to respond to, as well as the independent, focused work that needs to get done. And most people tend to put off their focus work until all the other more reactive, responsive, collaborative work is done. But the desired "free time" never materializes. My suggestion is to protect time during our workday for our most essential work *first*. Block your time, which is akin to booking a meeting with ourselves. And just like when you meet with another person, minimize email and turn off your notifications. Then dive into one of your most important priorities.

Another strategy is to pair our most important work with our highest energy. For most of us, our peak is in the morning. We have a trough seven hours later and then a recovery later in the day. Night owls find their peak energy late in the afternoon, but they still have a good amount of energy at the beginning of their workday, even if their workday starts later than others. Regardless, I recommend we all start our day with focused work, to take full advantage of that healthy, robust energy. We don't want to give away our highest energy to reactive tasks.

Should some of the onus be on employers to build a culture that enables productivity?

Absolutely. There are two strategies I recommend all leaders focus on. One, stop trying to do it all at the same time. The most effective organizations and the most effective leaders are clear on their three core priorities. And we want the same at the organization level, which trickles down to the department and individual levels. If an organization has more than three core priorities, they spread themselves thin and create chaos for their teams; they have more meetings and deadlines; they make slower progress; they feel frustrated; they end

up working overtime. That is not a productive environment.

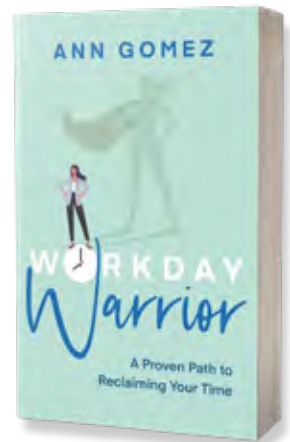
The second strategy is to support people to protect focus time. There is a ridiculous expectation in the workplace that people need to provide instant responses. We treat everything like it's urgent. As a result, people's attention is constantly diverted. We don't need instantaneous responses. We need timely responses. And we need to support people to protect focused work time, which allows us to work more efficiently and with less stress.

What are the steps to being more productive?

Be clear on what your core priorities are for both your work and your personal life. In my personal life, my core priorities are self-care and family. Those get the majority of my attention. Then I allow myself one personal project, like the photo project I mentioned earlier. In my work life, it's client work, content development and running a company.

Within your core priorities, rank the tasks on your list. We call this your MAP — Main Action Plan — which is a priority management system. That is a must-have tool for busy people. It's a strategic system to align your work to your core priorities, corporate KPIs, deadlines, goals and commitments, and to help you stay focused on what you value most.

The second tool is your plan for how you want to protect time for those core priorities. This will provide the structure to protect time for what matters most to you before other tasks get in the way. And the third tool — and this is what the world's most productive people do — is to constantly consider where you can scale back, streamline or seek help. That's not about cutting corners; it's about how to be a "multiplier" who simplifies and delegates. It's the opposite of what a lot of people do, which is overthink and overcomplicate work. Striving for perfection is a great way to overcomplicate work, and productivity does not need to be complicated. ■





FORCE

OF *Nature*

Kayla Kingdon-Bebb, BCom'07, Artsci'07, knew little about conservation when she first arrived in New Zealand in 2012. Eleven years on, she's advocating for climate action and biodiversity protection as chief executive of WWF

**Kayla Kingdon-Bebb
in the Taputeranga
Marine Reserve near
Wellington, New
Zealand's capital**



FOR THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS OF HER LIFE, KAYLA KINGDON-BEBB WAS SURROUNDED BY TREES. LIVING ON THE REMOTE RAINFOREST-CLOAKED COAST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, SHE WAS AWARE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM – BUT PERHAPS NOT FROM THE ANGLE ONE MIGHT EXPECT.

Her father worked in forestry and their family car featured the bumper sticker: “Hug a logger — You’ll never go back to trees.” So, if a young Kingdon-Bebb was told that she’d grow up to lead an environmental NGO, she would have said that was pretty far-fetched.

Now, living on the wild coast of Wellington, New Zealand’s capital city, Kingdon-Bebb is the newly minted chief executive of the Aotearoa (the Māori language name for New Zealand) branch of global conservation giant WWF (the World Wide Fund for Nature). Her message is a little different to hugging trees — let alone loggers. “People are waking up to the realities of what climate change and biodiversity loss mean. They’re two sides of the same coin,” she says. “Our survival as humans relies on us dealing with both.”

Tracing the origins of Kingdon-Bebb’s journey into the wilderness of environmental advocacy goes back to her days at Queen’s and an exchange semester in Taiwan. She needed to pick up an extra correspondence course to complete her two degrees and the only suitable option was Introduction to Aboriginal Studies. It was transformational in a way she never expected. “I had this awakening to the realities of colonization and how what had happened in Canada and internationally

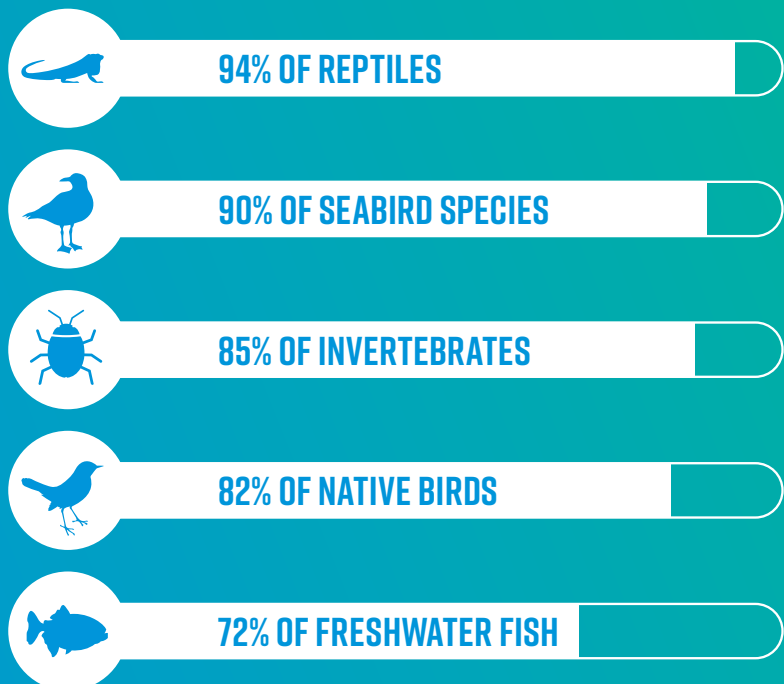
was wrong and needed to be remedied,” she says.

The experience inspired doctoral research at Cambridge University in the U.K., where Kingdon-Bebb studied natural resource management and legal systems of the Nisga’a Nation, which in 1998 became the first Indigenous community in B.C. to sign a modern treaty with the provincial and Canadian governments. Cambridge was also where Kingdon-Bebb met her husband, Matt O’Connor. The couple moved to New Zealand in 2012 to further O’Connor’s medical training. It was there that Kingdon-Bebb found her way into nature, via public service.

“I love working on public policy. If there’s such a thing as a *métier* or a calling, I feel like I’ve really found it,” says Kingdon-Bebb. She started out as a policy analyst at New Zealand’s Ministry for the Environment after reading a “fascinating” newspaper article about Māori freshwater rights. After a couple of years cutting her teeth on freshwater co-governance, she shifted tack, becoming private secretary to the minister of conservation. The second minister she worked for, Eugenie Sage of the Green Party, describes Kingdon-Bebb as the exact opposite of the grey bureaucrat stereotype. “She’s a live-wire

Losing wildlife

A third of New Zealand’s native species are threatened or at risk of extinction, and many are found nowhere else on Earth. Several factors are driving biodiversity loss, such as introduced predators (like rats, possums and stoats), the spread of invasive weeds, climate change and human activity on land and sea. Species at risk include:



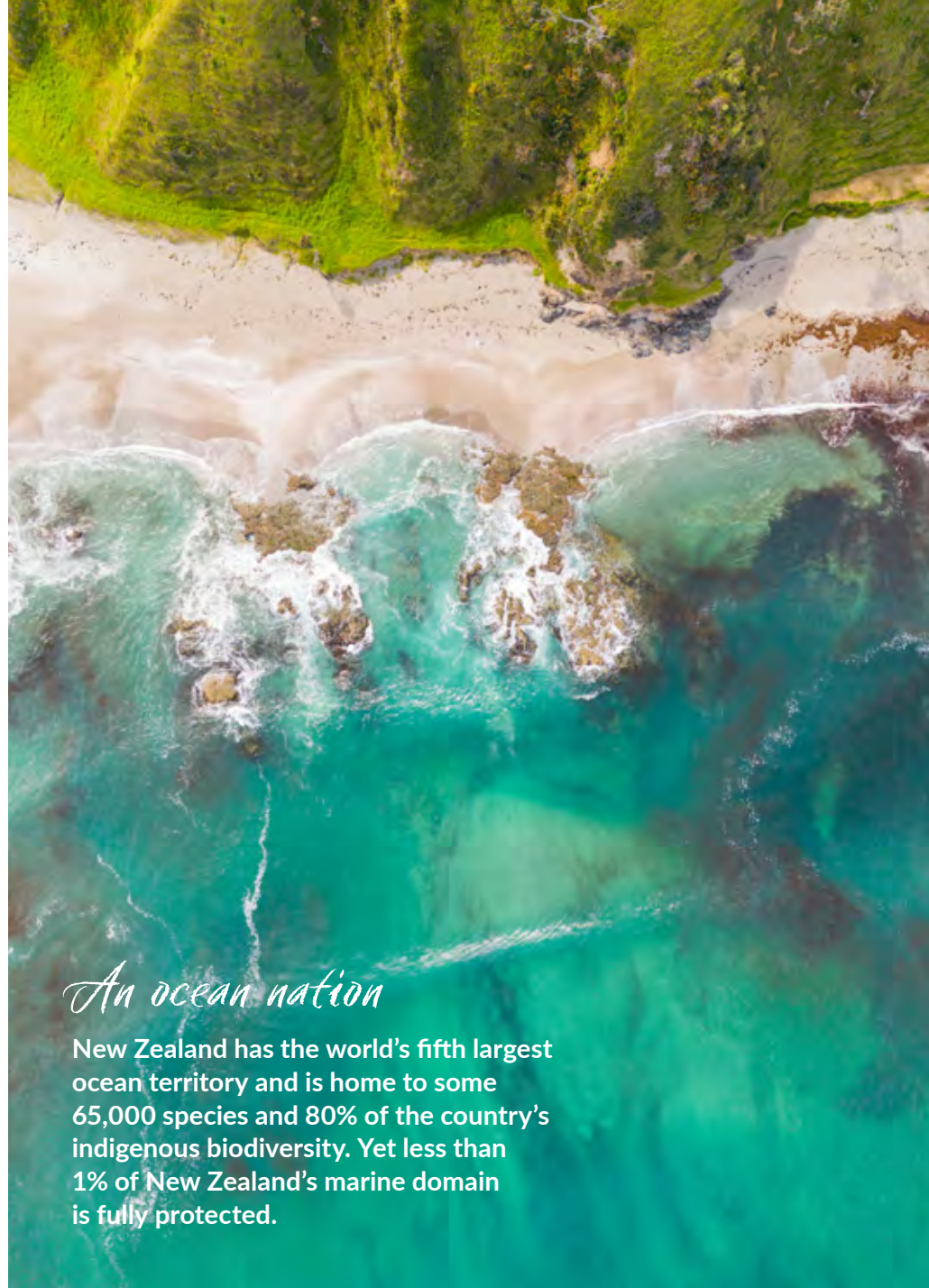
personality,” says Sage. “She’s smart, she’s strategic. She understands politics and personalities and knows how to get the best out of people and life. There is always laughter when Kayla is around.”

Weaving her expertise in Indigenous issues with a deepening knowledge of Aotearoa’s conservation landscape, Kingdon-Bebb’s stint at the Department of Conservation took her to many far-flung and spectacular corners of the country. The title of coolest place she’s ever been goes to the remote Antipodes Islands, about 860 kilometres southeast of the mainland. The 2018 trip, accompanying Minister Sage, involved a rough passage aboard a Navy vessel through the stormy Southern Ocean over multiple days and a stay in a hut that was once a supplies depot for shipwrecked sailors.

The trip marked the end of a four-year effort to rid the Antipodes Islands of introduced mice, which had invaded the remote archipelago that’s home to penguins, albatrosses and other seabirds, as well as two species of bright green parakeets found nowhere else. On other subantarctic islands, mice have been known to eat albatross chicks alive. That hadn’t been observed on the Antipodes, but New Zealand didn’t want to take any chances. Beyond preventing horrific albatross deaths, the removal of mice had other effects too. “What was absolutely astonishing was the recovery of the bugs,” says Kingdon-Bebb. “The huge diversity of moths, insects — and the smaller birds that live on the islands that are reliant on those invertebrates as a food source — also exploded.”

IN THE DEPTHS OF public service, it’s possible to get stuck. And sometimes, you must stay silent, even if there are issues you’d really love to champion and defend. For Kingdon-Bebb, it was a controversial report on Indigenous rights she helped write in 2019 called *He Puapua*. The aspirational report outlined ideas for how New Zealand could achieve the goals set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — especially self-determination, or *rangati-ratanga*, for Māori.

At first, the report was not made public. But when it was released in response



An ocean nation

New Zealand has the world’s fifth largest ocean territory and is home to some 65,000 species and 80% of the country’s indigenous biodiversity. Yet less than 1% of New Zealand’s marine domain is fully protected.

to an official information request, in 2021, it caused a furor that spilled out into the national media. Some called the report’s recommendations “radical”, “divisive” and even “the end of democracy as we know it.” While Kingdon-Bebb wasn’t surprised by the reaction, she says critics shouldn’t have been surprised by the report’s contents either. “You can’t start engaging with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and not countenance self-determination. It is literally the cornerstone of the Declaration. The report was always going to go there,” she says, adding that not releasing the report proactively contributed to the fear. “It was a master class in what not to do with a controversial report.”

As a government official at the time, Kingdon-Bebb couldn’t publicly defend the work she’s “really proud of.” Critical comments continue to bubble away online, two years on. In one online forum, anonymous commenters bad-mouth the *He Puapua* authors. “Never trust those with double-barrelled surnames,” one detractor writes. Kingdon-Bebb is unfazed. “The fact that it’s still in the national zeitgeist, I think, is a testament to the fact that these are questions worth asking and this a conversation worth having.” ›

TAKING UP THE HELM of WWF-New Zealand in February 2023 is a chance to unstick and unmuzzle herself. But she's also stepping up at a time when the organization needs to rebuild.

According to Sage, she's "a great person to provide the leadership to put the organization back on a strong footing." Kingdon-Bebb credits her grounding in business strategy as a major asset in her "recovery mission" to try and achieve financial sustainability, while also delivering conservation impact.

Globally recognized for its iconic panda logo, the bread-and-butter of WWF is combating wildlife extinction. New Zealand has no shortage of species at risk — more than 4,000 make the threatened species list. WWF-New Zealand supports on-the-ground conservation

efforts through projects ranging from seaweed restoration through to rehabilitating sick and injured penguins.

But for the organization's advocacy work, Kingdon-Bebb is focusing efforts strategically. "There are heaps of people working on our charismatic terrestrial species, our birds," she says, noting that the country is unusual for its lack of native land mammals, save for two bats. "But we're also the seabird capital of the world. Ninety per cent of our seabirds are threatened or at risk of extinction and many marine mammals are too. A lot of our critters in the ocean go . . . not unloved, but under-recognized because they're out of sight."

This means that at the top of the conservation outcomes list is boosting marine protection to 30 per cent of New Zealand's ocean territory — the fifth largest on the planet. "It's absolutely enormous. But less than half a

“In the climate adaptation space, the environmental, social and economic benefits of nature-based solutions stack up way better than hard infrastructure”

– Kayla Kingdon-Bebb

Save the seabirds

Home to penguins, albatrosses, petrels, shags, gannets, terns and skuas, New Zealand is the seabird capital of the world. One-quarter of Earth's seabird species breed there — and of those roughly 90 species are found nowhere else. Many are endangered. Commercial fishing practices are a major threat. Others are the loss of habitat, introduced predators, plastic pollution and climate change.





per cent of it is protected,” Kingdon-Bebb explains. “That is pretty damning for a country that, back in the 1970s, was a global leader in ocean conservation.” In the first few months of her tenure, she’s been outspoken on this failing and on a collapsed proposal to create a massive ocean sanctuary north of New Zealand, around the Kermadec Islands. In April, she penned a column with the title “We are killing our ocean, so why isn’t the government acting?” on the popular New Zealand news site *Stuff*. Behind the scenes, she’s deploying her political nous to influence decision-makers.

Politically, marine protection has proved as thorny as a sea urchin, with 50-year-old marine reserve legislation now sorely outdated in a society doing its best to uplift *te ao Māori*, or the Māori worldview. “You can’t really begin to grip any environmental issue or conservation action without engaging Indigenous rights and interests,” says Kingdon-Bebb. The idea of no-take reserves, in which no fishing is allowed in perpetuity, doesn’t mesh with some Māori approaches to management of the *moana* (ocean). Instead, *te ao Māori* often favours the rotation of resources using temporary harvesting restrictions called *rāhui*.

Kingdon-Bebb believes the country needs new marine protection tools — alongside a raft of other measures, like active restoration — to boost ocean health. With

her expertise in Indigenous issues, she is well-placed to navigate the choppy waters to 30 per cent protection by 2030 — the international target New Zealand signed up to as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the UN Biodiversity Conference (known as COP15) in Montreal in 2022.

Marine protection is not just a solution for nature, but also for the climate and people too. “We know that protected areas have a really important role as refuges for threatened species — the last kind of safe place they can call home. But they’re also really important in climate action because good, healthy wilderness is our best intervention when it comes to carbon sequestration and adaptation.” Kingdon-Bebb is keenly focused on these win-wins at the nexus of biodiversity and climate change, which are dubbed nature-based solutions.

For example, think of a sea wall versus a wetland. Both can help adapt to rising sea levels by protecting homes against storm surges. But wetlands also provide a home for flora and fauna. Plus, sea walls are capital-intensive, short-term fixes, whereas restoring a wetland or mangroves is more enduring and cheaper over time. “We have trouble putting a dollar sign on environmental benefits,” Kingdon-Bebb says. “But in the climate adaptation space, the environmental, social and economic benefits of nature-based solutions stack up way better than hard infrastructure.”

’M ON A MISSION to underscore to our political decision-makers that investing in making the change we need now to secure a safe future for future generations is not a nice-to-have,” she says.

It’s a tough mission in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis, which has seen politicians “kick the can down the road” on climate and biodiversity in favour of making gas cheaper for consumers. But Kingdon-Bebb radiates infectious energy and intellect that is sure to inspire Kiwis of all stripes, who care deeply about wildlife and wild places — so much so that New Zealanders are nicknamed after one of their unique bird species.

“We’ve got a great organization, we’ve got a great brand and we’ve got a mission that New Zealanders care about. I feel really optimistic.” ■



BY BRIAN BANKS

how to

BUILD

a better playground

Adam Bienenstock, EMBA'01, creates outdoor spaces that let kids be kids. His real goal: help children spend more time outdoors – feeling, climbing, jumping, running and discovering nature. Yes, there will be mud

N

o one in North America is more closely associated with the subject of reconnecting children to nature than California author Richard Louv. Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*, is the seminal work in this area. Published in 2005, it documented how children benefit from spending time in nature and triggered a movement in play and education by sounding an alarm about the harm done to kids' physical and mental health and cognitive development by societal trends that keep them indoors.

Given this, it isn't a surprise to hear Louv's name come up when I meet with Adam Bienenstock, founder of Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds, at his company's main production shop on a rural highway near Hamilton, Ont.

Bienenstock, the company, is Canada's foremost dedicated designer and builder of natural playgrounds, green schoolyards and outdoor classrooms — market niches that have seen dramatic growth in the past 20 years. Bienenstock, the man, as well as being a successful entrepreneur, is an international expert in natural playground design, children-nature engagement, collaborative project management and environmental advocacy.

Louv's book came out around the time Bienenstock and his wife, Jill, an early childhood education specialist and the company's director of education, were fine-tuning their business model. "Between that book and the moment that we knew we were having our kids, it all kind of gelled," he says.

More surprising, though, is the story Louv tells me later, over the phone. It's about Bienenstock's impact at annual conferences hosted by the Children & Nature Network, a non-profit that Louv, now in his mid-70s, co-founded in 2006.

"Adam has been to several of those conferences. Often there's 700 to 1,000 people there, but somehow many of them end up following Adam into the woods. I remember one time" — Louv laughs — "he comes rushing out of the woods with people behind him, and they're covered with mud, and there's mud on Adam's face and body. And he was trying to get me muddy.

"I didn't want to play at that particular moment, I think because I had to speak right after that. But he's been threatening ever since to get me into a mud puddle and finish the work. That's kind of Adam's spirit. He's a big kid, which is wonderful. And what he's doing is wonderful."

A playground (right) in Rio Grande Park in Alamosa, Colo. that was created by Bienenstock's company for a local public farming co-op

Bienenstock (below) chats with children at Matilda Natural Playground in Hamilton, Ont. His company designed the playground, which sits on the site of a former gas station





Being called a “big kid” by your sector’s No. 1 thought leader is not something a lot of company builders would appreciate. But Bienenstock, while deeply serious about his work and mission, is not your average company builder. “I am the child in the room that needs to grow the heck up,” he says. “I think that play is the core. It is the secret to not aging. I think it is the secret to growing up properly. And I think it is the secret to bring community together, in the middle. It is the hook that we should all seek.”

In essence, the Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds story is a manifestation of this belief. Not just that kids need to play, but that it must be outdoors — in nature or in outdoor spaces that incorporate natural materials, have trees and shade as a respite from a changing climate, and offer the attendant levels of risk and challenge that come with those environments.

“When we started, every plastic and steel and post and platform and rubber manufacturer told us that what we did was illegal and what we did was going to injure kids,” says Bienenstock. “There was no question in my mind that we were right, and they were wrong. Now, every single one of them has a line [that’s] natural or inspired-by-nature. That, to me, is progress.” This explains, in part, why Bienenstock describes his company as a “social entrepreneurship.” Growing the business has also meant growing the movement ignited by Louv’s book — not only by designing and building natural playgrounds but also by making the case that they are healthy, safe and needed.

Hence, Bienenstock is a frequent speaker at conferences. He advises planners and landscape architects. He and his team engage with standards boards and insurance groups. “You can rail against [opposition], but it doesn’t get you anywhere,” Bienenstock says. What works is to “solve the problem.”

A case in point: To counter “fear-based decision-making,” he partnered with a handful of academics — including Ian Janssen, professor at Queen’s School of Kinesiology and Health Studies — to review the academic literature on the relationship between risky play and children’s health. Their paper, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in 2015, concluded that “the overall positive health effects of increased risky outdoor play provide greater benefit than the health effects associated with avoiding outdoor risky play.”

His business achievement metrics are similarly inspired. “We measure our success by having the kids be connected to nature, an authentic experience in nature. The money is a byproduct. On any given day, right now, 280,000 kids are playing on one of our spaces. The target’s a million.”

For the industry as a whole, he wants to see 30 per cent of the market consist of authentic natural spaces for kids. “When we started, it was like, ‘oh, zero-point-zero-whatever.’ Now I’d say it’s a healthy seven to eight per cent.” ›

Touring the company yard, wearing a ball cap, a faded black t-shirt, khakis and bright orange running shoes, Bienenstock is in his element. The site is alive with the sound of hammering and power tools. Loaders and log handlers rumble over wet, muddy gravel. Employees we meet say hi and share a laugh.

There's nothing complicated about the 3.5 acre site. There's a modestly decorated mobile trailer office at the front, workshop bays in the middle, stacks of raw timber at the back and an array of stump stools, wooden bridges, elaborate log structures and other finished pieces on skids on the perimeter.

"On every single piece that goes out, you will always see the real log," Bienenstock says. That's part of what makes it a "natural" playground. He slaps his hand on a big trunk segment that's part of a piece in progress. "When this thing's installed, there'll be a spot right here where kids will rub enough that you'll

"I THINK THAT PLAY IS THE CORE. IT IS THE SECRET TO NOT AGING . . . IT IS THE HOOK THAT WE SHOULD ALL SEEK"

see the mark from the sweat of the palm of their hand. That means that this had the effect we wanted. You converted a kid in that process to loving this thing."

That aesthetic is just part of the Bienenstock formula, however. As Jill Bienenstock explains to me later, the structures and spaces they create are also nuanced, sophisticated designs attuned to the developmental, social and safety needs of children of all ages.

That can be small things, she says, like choosing the right type of shrubs and planting configurations so kids can "make it a living fort." Or it can involve incorporating "graduated challenges" into climbing structures, "which means

that the youngest can't get to the very top because we don't put a handhold there. So they will experience the component in a different way than an older child who can get to the top. Because if you can get to the top by yourself, then generally you can handle the fall."

All told, the company has about 70 staff, a diverse mix of designers, planners, educators and builders, including four master chainsaw carvers. Its installation team is based at a second, larger site nearby, where they keep their trucks, trailers, bulldozers and other heavy equipment. That group services the regional Canadian market. In the U.S., Bienenstock has an office in Boulder,



Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds has done more than 3,200 projects in North America

Bienenstock in the yard at his company's offices in Hamilton, Ont.



Colo., and project managers in other cities. It subcontracts installation and basic construction work there to local firms but will also send staff from Canada for things that require “serious expertise.”

Next stop for the pieces on skids is delivery to clients. “We do about four 53-foot tractor-trailer loads of finished product that leave here every week,” Bienenstock says. There’s no telling where they might end up. The list of Bienenstock clients and installation sites is as varied as its product line. To date, the company has completed more than 3,200 projects in Canada and the U.S. (along with a handful of consulting roles in Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Australia and Indonesia). Most of these are at community centres, municipal parks, schools and preschools — including the elementary school that Bienenstock attended in the 1970s when he was growing up nearby in the town of Dundas, within the city of Hamilton, where he still lives today.

But along with those, Bienenstock’s client list includes other unique, large and/or illustrious clients such as Parks Canada, the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, the Ontario Science Centre, Zion National Park in Utah and the Cabbagetown Business Improvement Area in Toronto.

For the latter, in 2022, the company built the Cabbagetown Parkscape project, a summer-long installation of five parkettes featuring dirt, plants, natural benches, climbers and other Bienenstock creations on Parliament Street, a busy north-south corridor. Bienenstock says street sites and other pop-ups are opportunities to reach children and their parents in “unlikely” places.

The Zion National Park project, still in progress, is Bienenstock’s largest. He’s under contract to “design the children’s experiences” for the 19-acre site of the park’s new Discovery Center, a public-private collaboration on donated land just outside the 590-square-kilometre park. Other partners include Zion Mountain Ranch, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah and the non-profit Zion Forever Project.

Bienenstock’s first link to the project

was a referral from David Sobel, a leading American author and consultant in nature-based education for children. “They engaged me in working with the landscape designers and the facility designers to describe a lot of my work on developmental psychology and nature engagement,” says Sobel. “I said, ‘I can do the theoretical aspect of this, but if you want somebody who’s going to execute good designs, you’ve got to talk to Adam.’ ”

In a recent article, Natalie Britt, Zion Forever’s president and CEO, was quoted saying the space that Bienenstock creates “will set a national precedent for experiential and immersive learning — a place where children are going to be able to feel the freedom of climbing on a rock and getting their hands and feet in the dirt . . . We are going to get them away from the digital world [of] devices and the pressures of social media.”



Although Bienenstock’s playground company took shape in the digital age, its origins lie in a personal and professional journey that started even before he founded his first landscaping business straight out of high school in 1984.

An American, born in Boston, Bienenstock is the second of three children. His father was a Jewish Hungarian whose family fled to England during the Holocaust. There he went to medical school and met Adam’s mother, also a doctor. They married and had Adam’s brother, then his father got a post at Harvard and they moved to the U.S. Next it was Buffalo, where Adam’s sister was born. Then, rather than be drafted into the army during the Vietnam War, his father chose to leave the U.S., landing at McMaster University in Hamilton. ›



“On every single piece that goes out, you will always see the real log,” Bienenstock says

“My formative years, between nine or 10 and 17, were all in Dundas, which is a world biosphere reserve,” Bienenstock says. “The [Niagara] Escarpment is this place that has rare salamanders and frogs and these weird junipers that are 400 years old. My childhood was steeped in all of that.” His path was also shaped by being dyslexic. So, while his brother and sister got scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge, he became “a really, really good landscaper and horticulturist.”

A decade in, he decided to up his game. He studied natural landscape design at the English Gardening School, then horticulture at Capilano University in Vancouver. “I was building very expensive gardens for very rich people, where my personal judge of success [was being] published in coffee table magazines,” he says.

At the time, he was also doing “school ground greening” on the side, “but it was never full time and it was never a

recognized thing that had value.” At one point, Bienenstock recalls, a client asked him to do a playground privately. “I drew it, it was a stream, it had stumps lying across it and a little ropey thing that went over the gully. And they kind of patted me on the head and said, ‘That’s nice, but we asked for a playground.’”

Their response did not dissuade him. “How can you not see that that’s better?” He laughs. “It’s so obviously better. You know, it has water and mud and it’s got balancing things and you’re going to fall off and get wet.”

A playground company still wasn’t in his plans when he enrolled in the Executive MBA program at Smith in 1999. But it and two other events in the same period helped pave the way.

The EMBA program was “transformative” in helping Bienenstock understand the big picture of running a company. “I’d been in business for years and years . . . it was like I knew most of the puzzle pieces, but I’d never seen the cover of

the box. And that program showed me the cover on the box.”

The same year he graduated, he also began seeing Jill. They were acquaintances as kids but went their own way as young adults before reconnecting. They married in 2002.

Lastly, immediately after finishing his EMBA, Bienenstock took a position as national program manager at Evergreen, a Toronto environmental nonprofit. There, he developed the original business concept for Evergreen Brickworks, now a massive community environmental centre at the site of a former brickyard and quarry on the floor of the Don Valley in the heart of Toronto, which had its grand opening in 2010.

At Evergreen, he also led initial development of the Native Plant Database (now managed by the Network of Nature) and was the designer and team lead for what was then a somewhat radical natural playground project at Toronto Metropolitan University. Bienenstock did other natural playground designs while at Evergreen, but none were built. “Every one of them [was] stamped not for construction. We couldn’t get the insurance, [the] perception of risk was still too high for the board to handle,” he recalls. He quickly grew frustrated trying to solve big environmental problems and execute his ideas within the

**“ON ANY GIVEN DAY, RIGHT NOW,
280,000 KIDS ARE PLAYING ON ONE OF
OUR SPACES. THE TARGET’S A MILLION”**



confines of a non-profit. “They’re too slow, they can’t take the risks required.” In 2002, he went back to his own business full time, where “I can take those risks all day.”

Dundas Central Elementary School is a large, historic, two-storey, red brick building in a mature, leafy residential neighbourhood not far from the foot of the Niagara Escarpment. Its first segment was built in 1857, making it the second oldest school in Ontario.

Bienenstock brings me here after our tour of his shop to show me one of his company’s finished products. But it’s not just any installation. He attended this school, as did his two sons. His house is a few blocks away. The house he lived in when his family moved to Dundas is across the street.

We head from the parking lot towards a clump of trees on the edge of a grassy area that occupies the front third of the school lot. “All of this was asphalt, and it took us nine years of convincing the school board that we should be allowed to do this.”

Under the shady canopy, on a bed of wood chips, are 20 or 30 stump stools that could double as stepping stones.

There are other trees clustered around the lot. Bienenstock points out some willows near the front. “All the stormwater from the site used to head to storm drains, now there are berms that direct it into that patch. That’s why the willows are thriving, because of how wet that is.”

Under another set of trees there are new plantings, a bench carved out of a big log and a framed outdoor blackboard. The latter were added earlier this summer, during the company’s annual “day of service.” The outdoor space works, Bienenstock says, because “the trees we planted over a decade ago have grown up big enough that you actually have proper shade in the space.”

We sit in another spot, and I ask Bienenstock, who is 57, what’s next. Earlier he said his focus is primarily on advocacy, strategic direction and major project design. But, while he still wears several hats, it’s clear his singular ambition is to influence action that connects nature and children, schools and communities on a bigger scale.

Last year, he ceded the CEO role to John El-Raheb, a 16-year company veteran. He’s also gradually sharing ownership of the business. Long-term employees who have become partners now hold 25 per cent of the company’s equity. It all gives him more time for the sort of conversations that now “interest

him. That could still involve larger projects, like Zion, but it also means working more with government and policymakers, as well as individuals in the private sector.

“I should be talking to, you know, billionaires who want to get things done and want to see change happen rapidly, who are interested in the environment and see connection to nature as an important part of that,” he says. “I should be involved in discussions with government, whether it be provincial or state or federal, so that they can start to understand how important it is to invest in outdoor education [and] how we scale planting more trees in these barren environments that our kids are learning in.”

Bienenstock nods at the trees and grass in the schoolyard before us. This is the “front line” he says.

“If we believe [being in nature is] important immunologically, developmentally, behaviourally, emotionally, from a resilience perspective, then we want those [natural] spaces when and where those kids play — in the school, or in the park or in their backyard. And if you go to places where the equity issue is there, they don’t have a backyard because they’re in an apartment. So it’s only the school [where] they’re going to have a shot.” ■



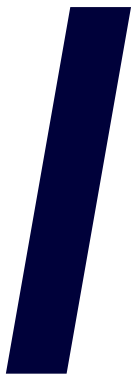
A LEAGUE OF OUR

Diana Matheson's overtime
goal at the London Games
in 2012 gave Canada its
first Olympic soccer medal
in more than a century

How Project 8, led by soccer superstar Diana Matheson, EMBA'23, is igniting a new era of professional women's sport in Canada

OWN

BY DEBORAH AARTS, Artsci'04



It's a few days after Canada's unexpected early exit from the FIFA Women's World Cup in August and Diana Matheson is everywhere. Here she is with post-mortem analysis in the pages of the *Globe and Mail*: "A women's league is necessary if Canada is going to have a national team that competes at the highest level." Here she is showing her broadcast chops in a chat with Raegan Subban on TSN: "There's no secret to women's soccer. The key is investment."

And here she is on CBC Radio, commenting on former teammate Christine Sinclair's post-loss quip that the result should be a "wake-up call" for more resources to support the women's game in Canada, including a domestic professional league — something that exists in every other country that competed in the tournament except Haiti: "I think it's important for Canadians to know we can catch up here."

It's not quite the conversation Matheson planned to have around the World Cup. In her interview for this article a few weeks earlier, on the eve of the tournament in Australia and New Zealand,

she was counting on a deep Canadian run to drive interest in Project 8 Sports Inc., the upstart organization she and her Smith classmate **THOMAS GILBERT, EMBA'23**, Artsci'15, founded in 2022 with the audacious goal of developing a professional women's soccer league in Canada by 2025. No one expected the team that won Olympic Gold in 2021 to fizzle in Australia.

But Matheson is not one to take her eye off the endgame. A disappointing match or two, even on such a high-profile stage, only reinforces the mission that has come to dominate her life since she hung up her cleats in 2021. Project 8 is deep in the work of creating a new sport ecosystem, and the organization's progress to date has offered validation point after validation point for the pent-up demand for a domestic women's league in Canada. Three — soon to be four — of the league's planned eight teams are sold (in Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto); a slate of founding sponsors are on board (including Air Canada, CIBC, Canadian Tire and DoorDash); and a coterie of agencies are helping build the branding, marketing and broadcasting muscle needed to win fan attention and loyalty.

Moreover, since the day last December when Matheson announced the league (with Sinclair at her side), she's been inundated with messages from young girls, grateful and giddy to have new and — no exaggeration — life-changing possibilities in the sport they love. Project 8 offers a rare chance to build both a world-class business and a more equitable sporting world. The stakes are high

and, with the league's launch date only a year and a half away, there's no time to dawdle. "There is just a really obvious gap and a really obvious opportunity here," Matheson explains. "It's like, how can this not work? Let's get going."

Thankfully, she knows how to hustle.



Diana Matheson's life shifted on Aug. 12, 2012. Two minutes into extra time in the bronze medal match at the London Olympics, with the score deadlocked nil-nil, she rushed towards the net on the right flank of a Canadian surge, picked up her teammate Sophie Schmidt's shot as it deflected off French defender Sonia Bompastor and pocketed the ball deep in the mesh. The goal won Canada its first Olympic soccer medal in 108 years, sparking new interest in the women's game and making Matheson a household name.

It's a highlight-reel moment, to be sure. But as any athlete will tell you, success is simply what happens when a whack of hard work meets the right moment. Matheson had been studying the game since she started playing it as a kid in Oakville, Ont., absorbing and improving through her award-winning tenure at Princeton University and her professional debut, such that when opportunity arose in London, she had both the skill and the confidence to strike. >

"WHEN THOSE FIRST TWO PRO WOMEN'S TEAMS WALK OUT ONTO A FIELD IN CANADA FOR THAT FIRST GAME, THAT WILL BECOME THE NEW FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN IN SPORTS HERE"

A GROWTH MARKET

Wondering whether there's money in professional women's sports in Canada? Wonder no more: the numbers show a compelling business case.

500%

Growth in audience for the U.K.'s Women's Super League from 2020 to 2021.

42%

Average per-match increase in attendance at the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023 vs. 2019.

\$1 MILLION

Franchise fee to purchase a team in the Canadian professional women's soccer league being built by Project 8.

23,233% TO
66,567%

Growth in value of U.S. National Women's Soccer League teams over 10 years.

33%

Average year-over-year commercial revenue growth in pro women's soccer clubs globally.

25%

Degree to which fans of women's sports are more likely to buy sponsor products than followers of men's sports.

\$150 - \$200
MILLION

Estimated size of the "underdeveloped" pro women's sport market in Canada, according to Canadian Women & Sport.

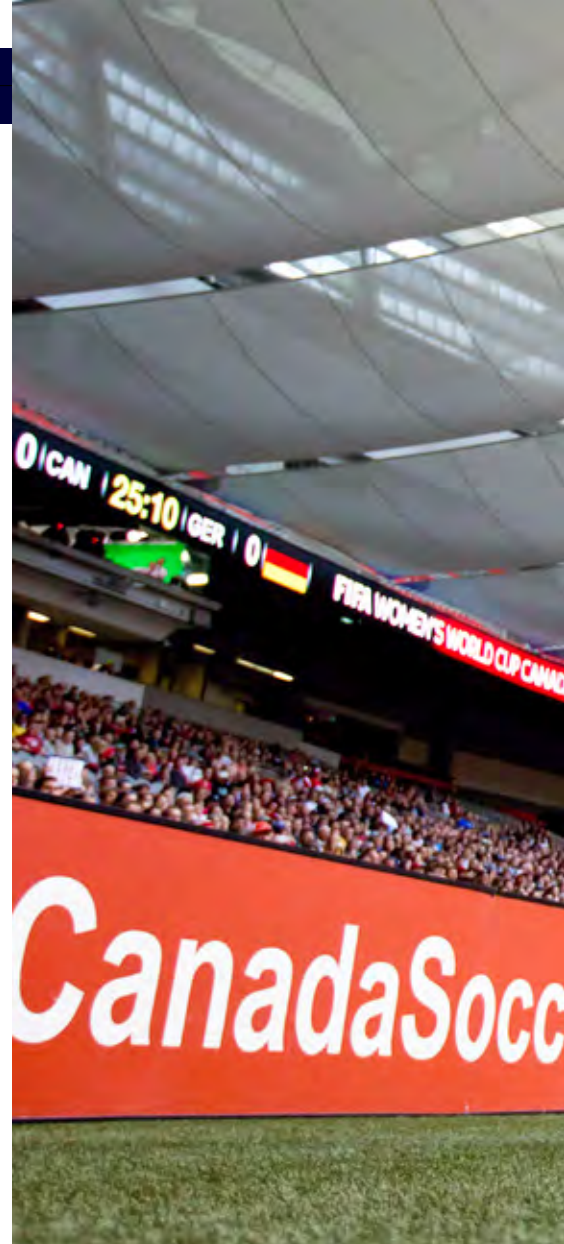
It's not hard to draw parallels to her work today.

Because Diana Matheson's life shifted again in the summer of 2021. That's when she: a) retired from playing after 15 years lacing up for national teams and pro clubs in Norway and the U.S., b) started both the Smith Executive MBA (supported by the Canadian Olympic Committee through its Game Plan program, of which Smith is a founding partner and the COC's exclusive business education partner) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Academy's Executive Master for International Players and c) began to think seriously about the feasibility of a pro league in Canada.

It wasn't a new idea. Canadian players had been following the growth of the U.S. National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), which employed many of them — including Matheson. She had played pro for teams in Washington, Seattle and Utah since the league's launch in 2012. Some, most notably Matheson's former teammate Carmelina Moscato, had started pursuing a domestic league that would allow players to earn a living at home in Canada. "We'd succeeded on the international stage for decades; the only thing missing was that professional side of the game. And we'd watched as the rest of the world really invested in that space," Matheson explains. "I knew I wanted to stay involved in helping progress that somehow."

Matheson's courses of study galvanized that notion into a plan. The UEFA program deepened her understanding of the strange and unique business of sport. The Smith EMBA equipped her with useful financial and management skills and, equally importantly, introduced her to Gilbert — an operations whiz who'd enrolled in the EMBA program to pivot a successful career in consumer packaged goods into something more purpose-driven. The two happened to be placed on the same team for the 16-month program, and the professional

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connection was immediate.

When Matheson suggested the team consider making the business case for a women's league during a pitch competition in the program's Entrepreneurship Essentials class, the challenge lit Gilbert up. The pitch was a smash, winning the most class votes and a fictional payout and catching the attention of instructor **ELSPETH MURRAY, MBA'87, Artsci'85** associate professor of entrepreneurship and strategy and CIBC Faculty Fellow in Entrepreneurship at Smith. "You could feel the passion coming through," recalls Murray, who now sits on Project 8's board. "It was so clear that they really understood this market."

Bolstered, Matheson and Gilbert couldn't stop talking about the league. They hashed out ideas over beers and jotted down concepts on napkins, to the point that when Matheson sent Gilbert

Matheson taking a corner kick for Team Canada during a match against Germany in 2014 in Vancouver



THE CONFIDENCE QUOTIENT

Diana Matheson learned a lot in her post-retirement studies, but her biggest takeaway was not something she read in a textbook or heard in a lecture. “As an athlete going into an MBA program, I think you’re a little intimidated that you don’t have the background or the knowledge to do it,” she reflects. “But I found really quickly that most people in the program feel that way. We all have a bit of impostor syndrome. As you get to know one another and why you’re all there, you get to learn and grow and leave the program with not just knowledge, but a ton more confidence.”

a voice memo in the spring of 2022 asking if he’d consider teaming up to pursue this for real, he was all in. “Diana is a force,” Gilbert observes, referencing her ability to galvanize people behind a cause. “It’s hard not to be inspired.”



If you’re going to turn your life over to a massive job like launching a pro sports league, it helps to believe that your work will make the world a better place. For Project 8, this is easy. A domestic professional women’s league stands to benefit players, who want the stability and earning potential — to say nothing of the desire to be close to friends and family — of working in their home countries. Every single member of Canada’s 2023 World Cup squad plays for a pro club or collegiate team in the U.S. or Europe. A Canadian league will create feeder teams and development streams that will deepen the country’s pool of talent. It will also

attract more female players to the game and — crucially — keep them there. Currently, one in three girls stops playing sports in adolescence, compared to one in 10 boys.

Yet, despite the clear societal benefits a pro women’s league stands to create, the business of it all has traditionally been hard for investors, execs and other purse-string-holders to get their heads around. And that’s where things get exciting. Audience interest in women’s sports generally — and women’s soccer, specifically — is growing with gusto. “There have certainly been other points in my career when I felt like it was on the path to breaking through,” reflects Nathalie Cook, who signed on to advise Project 8 after retiring from a storied run in sports media, most recently as vice-president at TSN/RDS. “This is a different inflection point.”

A few factors are driving this. This past World Cup aside, Canadian women tend to over-deliver on medals at international events. Nearly 80 per cent of Canadians see women in sport as great role models; half consider female athletes as fun to watch as men. Globally, social media has given women athletes new, gatekeeper-free ways to connect directly with extremely engaged fans. (Think of U.S. winger Megan Rapinoe, whose bold personality has drawn more than ›

Diana Matheson's classmate
Thomas Gilbert is her partner
in establishing a Canadian pro
women's soccer league



two million followers on Instagram.) It all adds up to a burgeoning audience that skews young and diverse — catnip for marketers and broadcasters.

Beyond fandoms, the investor ecosystem has changed. As the valuation of pro men's teams bloat and bubble (this past spring's frenzied bidding war for the beleaguered Ottawa Senators is exhibit A), would-be owners are finding the price point and the potential for growth of women's franchises appealing. In America's NWSL, teams that were purchased for as low as \$150,000 in 2012 are now worth between \$35 million and (in the case of the celebrity-backed Angel City FC) \$100 million each. These are numbers to sway even the most skeptical pragmatist.

Sponsorship appetites have evolved, too. As more and more companies adjust to stakeholder demand to invest in gender equity and social good, the ugly baggage of some legacy sports organizations is far riskier to prudent brands than organizations like Project 8 with clean slates and mandates to foster positive change.

"There is a compelling business opportunity here in Canada that is largely untapped and that is actually behind our global counterparts," explains Allison Sandmeyer-Graves, CEO of the advocacy organization Canadian Women & Sport, whose recent report, "It's Time" — which Cook contributed to — outlines how corporate Canada can meet unprecedented demand for professional women's sport. "Project 8's timing is really good."

O

Of course, an opportunity is only as useful as the ability to capitalize on it. That's why Matheson and Gilbert have been running full tilt for more than a

year. Project 8 is smack in the middle of a strategic plan that will see it through to its first match in April 2025.

The league's guardrails are strong: It will be a made-in-Canada solution, picking elements of what has worked for pro women's leagues in the U.S., Europe and Australia, and applying them to the unique requirements of our market. It will aim for world-class production values in everything the fan experiences, from her seat in the bleachers to the recaps she watches on her phone. And it will centre fair and safe treatment for everyone, with robust systems and structures to protect the integrity of the league and its players. "We absolutely have to build this thing differently," Matheson says.

Today, Project 8 has five employees and counting. Matheson has the title of CEO, but she and Gilbert operate as partners. His practical acumen complements her vision and convening power as they tackle problems together. "We're very symbiotic in how we collaborate,"

Gilbert says. "What's most important to both of us is that we make the right decisions about what we are building and find the right people to build it with." Most days are a blur of meetings, media appearances and check-ins with the web of partners working to get this thing off the ground. There are still team ownerships to secure, broadcasting deals to ink, players to sign and tickets to sell. The league doesn't even have a name yet. (It's coming, in 2024.)

It's a lot. But Matheson seems to have internalized fellow gender-equity trailblazer Billie Jean King's adage that "pressure is a privilege," using the high expectations on her as fuel for a mission that matters. "When those first two pro women's teams walk out onto a field in Canada for that first game, that will become the new foundation for women in sports here," she says. "We'll have a whole other mountain to climb, and a whole other pile of challenges. But getting to that point? That will be pretty exciting." ■

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Life and art transformed

Jenna Archer, MBA'16, began her career as an engineer. Then she discovered her creative passion

BY CAILYNN KLINGBEIL

WHEN JENNA ARCHER'S two young children are napping or asleep for the night, she heads to her home pottery studio and gets to work. She transforms clay into mugs, plates, bowls and other modern household ceramics that are shipped from her Calgary-based business to customers around the world. "When I get on my pottery wheel, I feel very grounded," she says. "It's where I'm supposed to be."

It took boldness to get here; to reshape her life from a corporate career to the roles of artist, entrepreneur and mother to a two-year-old daughter and five-year-old son. Archer was an engineer in the oil and gas industry in Calgary, earned her MBA and then worked in several digital leadership positions at GE.

But after giving birth to her son and taking a year-long maternity leave, she couldn't picture herself returning to >

the business world that she had spent the past nine years rising in. “Ultimately, my corporate career was no longer aligned to my truth and serving the life I wanted to lead — a life filled with creative freedom, quality time with family and friends and adventure,” she says. “I did a lot of reflecting over that year and decided that I needed to do something that I was truly passionate about.”

Archer launched her ceramics shop Jenna Archer (jennaarcher.com) in 2019, combining her skills as a ceramic artist with her extensive business knowledge. After four years of building her company primarily during evenings and weekends, Archer recently hired branding and marketing consultants to help her business grow nationwide. She also launched Flower Girl Goods, a sister company for ceramic smokeware. “I truly love what I do,” she says. “And for me, that made the leap to starting my business far less scary.”

Artists in the family

Archer’s introduction to pottery happened by chance in 2010. The recent mechanical engineering grad passed a ceramics studio one morning and glimpsed a pottery wheel demonstration through the window. “I walked by and was just captivated by the therapeutic quality that pottery offers,” she says. She signed up for evening classes. She still has the first piece she made: a small black bowl.

Soon, Archer was spending most of her spare time at the studio. She took an engineer’s approach to pottery. Armed with a logbook and scale, she weighed the clay after cutting it, measured it after throwing it, and weighed it again after it was fired, glazed and fired again. Knowing exactly how much the clay shrunk helped her learn how to create consistent pieces.

Eventually, with her cupboards full of pottery (and her family’s and friends’ cupboards filled too), Archer began selling her work at local markets. She loves how her handcrafted pieces encourage connection with self and others, like a mug clutched for morning coffee or plates pulled out for a boisterous family gathering.

Pottery remained a hobby, though, with Archer’s attention on her engineering career. She wore many hats as



Jenna Archer with one of her pottery creations

a project engineer at Keywest Projects, dabbling in human resources, business development and corporate development. Wanting to evolve as an engineer, Archer applied for and was accepted into Smith’s full-time MBA program.

About a week before her move to Ontario, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. She went through two surgeries and radiation therapy in Kingston, all while working on her MBA. She was able to spend the last two months of the program on exchange in Japan.

After graduation, Archer worked for two-and-a-half years in three leadership positions at GE, including a marketing role for the global operations team, commercializing a pipeline leak detection software and commercializing software for health care.

Later, as Archer began to grow her pottery business, she leaned on that varied work experience and education. She drew on her marketing background to create a strong value proposition and brand promise for her company, centred on making everyday life a little more beautiful. And she worked in sprints — the same method used in software development that she learned at GE — to test aspects of her business, fail fast and pivot when necessary.

Archer is intentional about seeking out the parts she misses from her past

life, such as working on a team. She regularly collaborates with other businesses, like a mug project with the popular Western Canadian cupcake chain Crave Cupcakes. She recently started teaching pottery to others.

One of the hardest parts of running a business has been her change in title and the effect on her ego. “I felt very proud to say that I was a female engineer,” she says. But, she adds, she comes from a line of strong women artists: her mom is an author, her grandma was a painter and her great-grandma was an award-winning cake decorator.

Balancing being an entrepreneur and mom isn’t always easy. “I am continually reflecting on how I manage my time as an artist/entrepreneur and mother to ensure I am present in both roles — this is the hardest aspect of both my jobs,” she says.

Yet, in her studio Archer feels at home. Her finished pottery sits on a storied yellow table that was Archer’s grandmother’s painting table, and before that, her great-grandmother’s dining room table. When she’s at work on the nearby pottery wheel, there’s a meditative, smooth quality to working with clay, she says, while the repetitive motions of wheel throwing bring a soothing calmness. The clay can be transformed, just like each one of us. ■



Interested in alumni events?

Being a Smith graduate has many benefits. One of these is the extensive network of other alumni that you can tap into. A great way to connect is through events held by Smith Alumni Chapters in Calgary, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver and China, plus a chapter dedicated to analytics and artificial intelligence. You can learn about upcoming events hosted by Smith Alumni Chapters and more by becoming a SmithConnect.com member.



A portrait of Alain Mootoo, a man with short dark hair, wearing a grey blazer over a light blue t-shirt. He is sitting at a table with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a dark, vertically-slatted wall.

A career in caring

In his work and life, Alain Mootoo, MMIE '18, aims to empower the overlooked and marginalized among us

BY ROSALIND STEFANAC

HOW DO YOU GO FROM being an auditor on a small Caribbean island to overseeing fundraising operations at one of the premier mental health research centres in the world? Alain Mootoo will say it's about trusting your gut, taking risks and working towards something you truly care for. "I may be good at accounting, but education and entrepreneurship and making a difference is what I'm really passionate about."

True to his word, Mootoo took many risks before securing his current role as chief operating officer at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Foundation in Toronto. The first was leaving a full-time post at PwC in Trinidad and Tobago to move to Canada in search of a culture more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community he is part of.

During a two-week holiday in 1998 to visit his sister in Toronto, Mootoo sent resumés to all the major accounting firms in the area. He uprooted his life after earning a spot at Ernst & Young as a senior auditor. Then, several years in, when he discovered his foreign-trained accounting certification prevented him from progressing up the corporate ladder, he switched gears to join Corus Entertainment as director, planning and analysis for a \$215-million network of 52 radio stations across the country.

Trusting his instincts, Mootoo pivoted once again in seizing an opportunity to join March of Dimes Canada, where he led finance and administrative functions for the community-based charity and created Toronto's first Pride Day float for people with disabilities. Not only was the work fulfilling, but it also steered him towards his ultimate career path in non-profits, where he can use his skills to help those in most need of support.

Mootoo went on to make his mark in senior financial management positions at several non-profits, including Surrey Place where he helped increase revenues by 82 per cent and developed four new full-time positions for those with "lived" experience in developmental disabilities and autism. He even launched a charity, Join the Dance Canada, making dance programs accessible to more than 2,500 youth at inner-city Toronto schools.

"I realized that if I'm going to do this career, I'm going to focus on people who are overlooked and marginalized, and I'm going to help shine a light on them,"

says Mootoo, remembering his struggles as a flamboyant adolescent growing up in Trinidad and Tobago, where it was illegal to be gay. A victim of school bullying so severe it prompted frequent fainting spells, he says he didn't know what being gay was, even though he was called it. That was in the early 1980s, back when almost no one talked about mental health. "When doctors attributed my fainting spells to psychological issues, that was like a death sentence," he says.

Intrapreneurial thinking

Today, it's particularly fitting that Mootoo is at an organization where mental health and the marginalized communities most impacted are at the forefront of a major fundraising effort. In overseeing operations and strategy at the CAMH Foundation since 2022, Mootoo is contributing to a \$500-million fundraising campaign called "No one left behind," the world's largest in support of hospital-based mental health research. Funds will help build a state-of-the-art, 385,000-square-foot research and discovery centre to be completed by 2027, which is expected to attract top researchers in the field from around the globe. "Mental health is the number one health issue right now . . . so to be able to contribute to a campaign that will impact the communities I'm passionate about is pretty amazing."

He's also looking to enhance the centre's technology systems and

processes. "We have over 54,000 donors and we're in the middle of major data mining to understand trends that will help us engage them around new proposals," he says. In leading the foundation's equity, diversity and inclusion committee, Mootoo aims to inspire "courageous conversations" around diversity in the workplace too, while improving employee engagement, which he says is already showing significant uptake compared to last year.

Looking back on his career so far, he notes the importance of being an "intrapreneur" — someone who can challenge the status quo by offering new ideas and perspectives. "My experience with many organizations is that their success becomes a barrier to future success because they get stuck in a certain way of operating," he says. "Intrapreneurs are needed to shake things up in a positive way."

Being the person to do the shaking up isn't always easy. Mootoo credits the Master of Management Innovation & Entrepreneurship (MMIE) program at Smith for giving him new tools and perspectives to consider in improving business operations. "The program gave me a lot of hope and inspiration that this is the right career path for me," says Mootoo. "In business, it's not just about achieving goals and hitting the numbers, but it's about being an advocate for ourselves and others like us." In other words, it's about reaching for something bigger and creating a better future where, Mootoo says, "no one is left behind." ■



A billboard for CAMH's current fundraising campaign, which Mootoo is involved in



Success with dress

Xenia Chen, BCom'14, never dreamed of starting her own business. Then she ran into a common problem with womenswear

BY ANDREA YU

IT WAS JUST A FEW MONTHS after completing her Commerce degree that Xenia Chen noticed how tough it was to find a pair of tights that would last. She was working as an investment banking analyst at TD, and hosiery was a regular part of the office wardrobe. "It was frustrating," Chen recalls. "I would go through so many pairs a week and I couldn't find a brand that I loved."

At the time, Chen didn't think about turning her apparel issue into a business. As an immigrant from Shenyang, China (her family moved to Toronto in 1997, when Chen was five), her parents encouraged her to find a stable job with benefits. "I had no interest in becoming an entrepreneur," she recalls. "I thought I'd be climbing the corporate ladder and making partner one day."

Chen's finance career with TD brought her to New York City in 2016. Then, in 2017, she returned to Toronto for an associate role in private equity at the investment management firm Onex. There, she worked 12-hour days. Yet, the job offered some reprieve from the demanding schedule at TD where she sometimes clocked 16-hour days. "After

having no life for three years, I thought I had so much free time,” Chen recalls with a laugh.

As she approached the new year in 2018, she decided to start a project with her newfound free time — developing a business to solve her hosiery problem. Chen improved the traditional design of tights based on responses from 200 women who answered a research survey she sent out. The new design had a contour control top that smoothed out targeted areas (front of the stomach, sides of the hips) and lifted the butt, yet was still comfortable to wear all day. She also extended the leg length by two-and-a-half inches to avoid the “double crotch” — when tights are too short to be pulled up to the wearer’s actual crotch. Lastly, she added a double-reinforced sheer toe to prevent holes. Later, she evolved the design to include a shaped foot for a better fit.

Chen was determined to make the product affordable. People are happy to

pay more than the ten dollars that drug-stores charge for tights, but they don’t want to spend \$100, she says. Rather, her hosiery is currently priced from \$23 to \$46.

Chen kept working on her business idea during evenings and on weekends. She invested \$10,000 of her savings to get it started. Eventually, she settled on a company name: Threads. “I knew I wanted to branch out into other wardrobe basics, and it was a great neutral synonym for clothing.”

By October 2018, Chen had launched her improved tights (known as the Sheer Contour), and, with no marketing budget, saw her sales grow month over month at her online store, yourthreads.co. “That period was complete madness,” she remembers. On weekends, she’d go to her parents’ house in Richmond Hill, north of Toronto. There, she kept her stock of tights, turning the dining room table into a makeshift fulfilment centre. Chen’s sisters, twins who are nine

years younger than her, along with her mother, were enlisted to help package and label orders.

Adding new products

It was in February 2019, four months after launching Threads, that Chen left her job at Onex. “It felt really good and really freeing,” she says of her decision to dive full-time into entrepreneurship. “I owed it to myself to give this a try.”

Jokingly, Chen says she’s glad she didn’t know how much work it would take to carry her business through the Covid-19 pandemic. “Had I known, I would have said: ‘Okay, it’s time to quit.’” Like nearly all companies during this crisis, Threads faced supply chain issues but pivoted to mask-making early in the pandemic (thanks to its Italian-based factory foreseeing the need for reusable PPE and suggesting it to Chen) until the need for business wear rebounded.

Chen is grateful that she stuck with it. Last year, Threads branched outside of hosiery with nipple stickies — reusable covers that are worn under clothing to create a smooth shape. This year, it added contour shorts and bra tape. The new launches have bolstered already strong sales. Threads’ sales grew 115 per cent year over year from 2021 to 2022. Growth is projected at 90 per cent this year.

Adding to Threads’ achievements are major media coverage in places like the *Today* show, *Fashion* magazine and *Good Housekeeping*. That’s thanks in part to the company’s gender inclusivity policy, which has made Threads popular with people in the drag and cross-dressing communities. It’s another way that the company sets itself apart from competitors. Threads also now sells fly-contour tights designed for men. And it has expanded its distribution network. In addition to selling online, its products are now available in small independent clothing shops.

While Chen says she still faces ups and downs as a business owner, she has no regrets about becoming an entrepreneur. “I think it can be really addictive,” she says. She is currently expecting her first child, due in November. A potential successor for her business? “That would be amazing,” Chen says, quickly adding, perhaps as a product of parental expectations herself, “but I wouldn’t want to push my kids into anything.” ■



KELLY McCRIMMON, EMBA'03, took home the ultimate prize in June, winning the Stanley Cup with the Vegas Golden Knights. Kelly is the team's general manager. But he's not the only Smith connection to the NHL champs. **CYRIL GODDEERIS, BCom'00**, is a minority owner of the Golden Knights.



Alumni Notes

1970s

TOM REILLY, BCom'76, is living in Mississauga, Ont., and tells us he's retiring at the end of December. He says travelling, spending time at his summer property with his wife and volunteering for several service organizations will keep him busy. "I'm also looking for a chess club or other players to hone my game."

VICTORIA STEELE, BCom'79, is excited to share she has obtained her Certified Management Consultant (CMC) designation. Based in Ottawa, Victoria says, "I continue to consult in arts and non-profit management, teach part-time with Sprott School of Business at Carleton

and lead the bilingual online Contemporary Management of Arts and Culture program at the University of New Brunswick.”

1980s

BARBARA HAVROT, MBA'81, says that the YouTube channel she launched as a retirement project has amassed 18,000 subscribers and 2.5 million views. Barbara is a former high school math teacher. Her channel covers all the lessons in Grade 10 university mathematics, Grade 11 functions, Grade 12 advanced functions and Grade 12 calculus and vectors. Barbara currently resides in Ottawa.

ERIC WINDELER, BCom'82, LLD'15, shares that he's shifted out of his role as executive director of Jack.org and into a founder role at the national mental health charity he started in memory of his son, who the family lost in 2010. "I'm grateful for the support of Queen's University and my graduating class of Commerce 1982."

ELSPETH MURRAY, MBA'87, Artsci'85, received the Distinguished Service Award from Queen's University. The professor of strategy and entrepreneurship came to Smith in 1996 and led the launch of the Centre for Business Venturing in 2003. She was recognized as an innovative thinker and pioneer who has created and prioritized entrepreneurial opportunities for students.

1990s

When **ATUL CHANDRA, MBA'90**, became the CFO at HomeEquity Bank in 2016, the company's income was less than \$12 million. Fast-forward to 2022 and the culture of fiscal and regulatory responsibility that he created propelled the bank to earn income over \$77 million. It's one of the reasons he earned a shout-out in the *Globe and Mail's* Best Executive Awards. His achievements also include leading the bank's first-in-Canada sale of reverse mortgages to investors.

2000s

ALLISON WOLFE, BCom'01, was honoured in the *Globe and Mail's* Best Executive Awards. Allison has spent the last 13 years with Oxford Properties Group and is currently CFO and global head of portfolio management. She was recognized for her commitment to finding the best workflow and tools for her team, including implementing the automation of key processes, introducing a cloud-based investment pipeline management tool and enhancing the company's management reporting.

SHARON BAIN, EMBA'05, is living in Winnipeg and tells us that in retirement she created the Better Financial Future

ALUMNI READER



DESIGN THINKING

Since launching her Ottawa-based knowledge transfer and management consulting firm Spring2 Innovation 12 years ago, **NILUFER ERDEBIL, MBA'03, BSc(Eng)'96**, has encouraged governments to embrace

design thinking. In *Future Proofing by Design: Creating Better Services and Teams in the Public Sector Through Design Thinking*, she introduces readers to the key steps of design thinking with the goal of increasing innovation, building resilience and creating efficiencies.



TOP TEAMS

JACQUES NEATBY, EMBA'99, Artsci'88, is a partner at MindLab, a consultancy that specializes in supporting executive teams with their strategic alignment issues. Jacques, who lives in Montreal, also teaches executive team

best practices at business schools. In *Leadership Team Alignment: From Conflict to Collaboration*, he and INSEAD associate professor Frédéric Godart offer a strategy to build and manage top executive teams, plus tools to identify leadership misalignment.



CRIME FICTION

Novelist **MELODIE CAMPBELL, BCom'78**, has won accolades for her crime writing, including the Derringer Award and Crime Writers of Canada Award of Excellence. Her latest whodunit, *The*

Merry Widow Murders, takes place aboard a cross-Atlantic ocean liner in the Roaring Twenties. When a dead man turns up in her stateroom, Lady Lucy Revelstoke, the unconventional widow of a British lord, must find the murderer before authorities dig into her past.

Smith Remembers

HAROLD (HAL) PRINGLE, BCom'48, passed away at the age of 97 on Feb. 5 in Ancaster, Ont. After university, Hal became a chartered accountant and was recognized as one of the leading experts in Canada on business interruption insurance matters. He appeared as an expert witness in many court cases where business valuation or loss of income matters were in dispute. He loved playing tennis, squash and golf. He golfed into his 90s. He is survived by his three children, including **ANDREW PRINGLE, BCom'85**, and Jake Pringle, Artsci'88, and two grandchildren.



MARY WALLACE (SWEENEY), BCom'50, died on June 20 at her Dunrobin, Ont., cottage after a short battle with cancer. She was 95 years old. Mary was a high school teacher for 37 years. She also had a keen interest in genealogy and was a founding member of the Ontario Genealogical Society's Palatine Special Interest Group. This year

she was honoured with the group's Eula C Lapp Award, which recognizes Irish Palatine descendants' significant contributions to Irish Palatine genealogy. Predeceased by her husband, Charles Wallace, Artsci'50, and one son, Mary is survived by two children, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

GRAHAM SKERRETT, BCom'60, died on June 27 at Abbie Lane Hospital in Halifax. Graham became a chartered accountant after Queen's. He was also a member of St. James United Church in Dartmouth, N.S., where he served as treasurer for several years. Graham loved to square dance, travel and curl. He is survived by his wife Sue, four children, 11 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

ROSS WILBY, BCom'60, died on March 3 following a brief illness. He was 88 years old. Ross met his wife Gwen during his time in Kingston, and they settled in Burlington, Ont., to raise their family. Ross worked in human resources at Stelco for a few years, then joined rival steel company Dofasco, where he had a long career in personnel development. In retirement, Ross enjoyed playing golf, bridge, collecting vintage jazz and hot dance records from the 1920s and spending time at the family cottage at Cedar Springs. Ross is survived by Gwen, their three sons, including **JOHN WILBY, BCom'86**, and three grandchildren.

WAYNE ALEXANDER, MBA'66, BSc(Eng)'64, died on March 3. He was 81 years old. While completing his undergrad in mechanical engineering, he played saxophone in the Queen's bands and was involved in organizing the 1964 Science Formal. Queen's is also where he met his wife, Jane Trussler, Artsci'66, PHE'67. After completing his MBA, Wayne began a career with IBM. He retired in

1994. The family spent the ski season and summers at their cottage on Belmont Lake in Ontario, where Wayne taught his children and grandchildren to sail. Wayne is survived by Jane, his three children, including **RANDY ALEXANDER, MBA'00, BSc(Eng)'95**, and Greg Alexander, BSc(Eng)'93, and four grandchildren.



JOHN EDEN CLOUTIER, MBA'68, PhD'84, died on March 17 in Ottawa. Eden, as he was known to family and friends, pursued a flying career at CMR Saint-Jean and RMC-Kingston. He flew for the RCAF and was stationed across Canada until 1966. After earning his MBA, Eden worked at the Bank of Montreal. He returned to Kingston for his doctorate and spent the remainder of his career as a federal civil servant and economist in Ottawa. Eden was predeceased by his wife, Elizabeth (Libby) Cloutier, Artsci'62, and one son. He is survived by two children, including Gillian Smith, Artsci'96, and three grandchildren.

KENNETH SMEE, MBA'71, died on May 10 after battling cancer. Ken spent the early part of his career in the Canadian Armed Forces. He was also on the faculty at RMC. After leaving the service, Ken earned his MBA. He spent several years at Alcan, then joined the Royal Bank of Canada. In retirement, Ken was a member of the RMC Club and chaired an advisory body at Smith and the Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto. He enjoyed travelling the world with his wife, Willie. He is survived by three children, including John Smeë, BSc(Eng)'93, MSc'95; and eight grandchildren, including Madeleine Smeë, Artsci'21, Charlotte Smeë, BSc(Eng)'23, and Lindsey Smeë, Artsci'24.

JOHN QUATTROCCHI, BCom'82, died on July 15. He was 64 years old. John was a CPA and spent a good portion of his career working for the Dorchester Corporation, most recently as executive VP and CFO. His favourite pastimes were going for long drives on weekends in his Mustang, putting in the garden and cruising the Caribbean. John is survived by his wife of 40 years, Angela, and two children.

GRAEME NORWOOD, BCom'07, died on May 6 at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Toronto of a rare cancer. He was 38 years old. After graduating, Graeme earned his law degree at the University of Windsor and was a practising attorney, most recently with Chitiz Pathak LLP. He is survived by his wife, Ivana, and their two children.

ANOOP SINGH, MBA'12, died in Oakville of cancer on July 21. He was 40 years old. Anoop is described by family as a father, husband, son, brother, sports fan, tech nerd and a retiree at heart. He loved to relax outside, rewatch the "Marge vs. the Monorail" episode of *The Simpsons* and build Magna-Tiles villages with his daughter, Satya. He is survived by her and his wife, Supriya.

Investment Club (BFFIC) and is using her finance and accounting skills to teach women about investing. The club recently celebrated its seventh year of operations.

COURT CARRUTHERS, EMBA'05, tells us he recently completed his doctorate in business administration at Pepperdine Graziadio Business School. Court is the CEO of global packing company TricorBraun and has been living in the northern Chicago suburbs with his wife, Kirstin, and their teenage boys for the last 10 years. "Thankfully they are still fans of the Oilers and Leafs respectively!" he writes.

ADAM GORDON, MBA'09, says that as president of Gordon's Downsizing & Estate Services he's been helping the team grow its sales and service area across Ontario. "We've seen significant growth happening in the GTA and Ottawa areas... If you know someone that needs help with downsizing or settling an estate, you've found the right real estate company." Outside of the office, Adam says he, his wife **HEATHER CAMPBELL, BCom'02**, and their three children enjoy travelling. One of their recent trips was to Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

2010s

PERRY DOODY, EMBA'10, shares that compensation management solution provider CompTrak, which he co-founded with **LASSE**



We know how much our alumni love their pets, so earlier this year we ran a photo contest giveaway for some Smith swag. This picture of Alejandro Abarca, MFIT'23, and his Corgi Frisco was our winning entry. "Frisco was my steadfast companion through my entire academic program, offering unwavering support every step of the way," Alejandro says.

SILEGREN, EMBA'10, has been acquired and added to the product suite of HRSoft, the global leader for cloud-based compensation lifecycle management software. "Lasse and I met through the EMBA program, and what a journey it has been!" Perry writes.

SAMEER SAIFAN, MFin'11, is living in Courtice, Ont., and tells us he's joined Group Risk Management at RBC as an associate

director. Sameer has been with RBC since 2011 and was previously a senior financing specialist at the bank.

ERIC KOURI, BCom'17, tells us he recently relocated to Chicago to take on expanded responsibilities with Molson-Coors as senior marketing manager, Coors Light Equity. "Loving Chicago and would love to hear from classmates planning to visit the Windy

City. So much to see and do!" Eric says.

MARLEY ALLES, BCom'18, says she has recently launched Canada's first peer-to-peer clothing rental app, Rax. Troubled by the ethical, environmental and societal implications of the fast fashion sector, Marley says she "embarked on a mission to enact positive change." Her app encourages the adoption of the circular fashion

If you're ever in...

Paris

Tiffany James, MIB'17, lets us in on some of her favourite spots in the city known for its food and fashion

Born in Toronto, Tiffany James had her sights set on a career in law until her third-year Commerce exchange to Milan turned her on to the fashion and beauty industry. Today she works at L'Oréal in Paris and is the global head of CRM, loyalty and Web3 for Yves Saint Laurent Beauté. After nearly eight years in the French capital, she suggests making these stops if you get the chance to visit.

Tourist traps you can't miss:

Montmartre is usually packed with tourists, so many locals avoid that area, but it's really a lovely district with a lot of rich history. I recommend checking out the Musée de Montmartre for an afternoon; it tells the interesting backstory behind Montmartre and the many artists that lived there. It also has a nice garden on the grounds to sit and grab a drink.

Hidden gem:

There are a handful of beautiful *passages couverts* (shopping arcades) around Paris, which are these ornate covered pathways lined with charming shops and restaurants. Walking through them feels like being thrown into the past. There are over 20 of them left in Paris, but the ones I frequent the most are in the 2e arrondissement. I love Passage des Panoramas (bonus hidden gem: inside this passage there's a fun speakeasy under Lombem that can be reserved for a small group). I also occasionally pop into Passage du Grand Cerf and Galerie Vivienne, but there are many other great passages to check out.

Shopping anyone?

Le Marais is probably the most recommended shopping district for a reason. It has lots of great boutiques and it's dotted with coffee shops, restaurants and bars to make frequent pit stops while shopping. If you're looking for some unique gifts to



bring back, pop into Officine Universelle Buly — the original location is on the Left Bank, but the one in Le Marais is also a beautiful location to browse.

Best place for families:

Paris has a lot of beautiful parks and gardens that are great for families to spend the day. Set up a picnic in Jardin de Tuileries or spend the afternoon strolling Jardin de Luxembourg after grabbing brunch on the Left Bank. To go a little bit more off the beaten path, there's an elevated park on the east side of Paris called Coulée verte René-Dumont, where you can go for an idyllic walk above the city.

My fav restaurant:

My favourite restaurant changes constantly because we are spoiled for choice, but there are two that I frequently recommend as of late. The first is Terra. It's ideal for two because all their main courses are meant to be shared; their menu is concise and well done. I also love taking visitors to Derrière for dinner or brunch; it has a more unique and quirky vibe, but the food is great and the connected bar, Andy Wahloo, is great to grab a drink in the evening.

My tip for visitors:

I recommend learning some basic French phrases and etiquette before you come; nothing too complex — locals don't expect tourists to be fluent but they appreciate the effort. For example, saying "bonjour" when you walk into a shop is considered basic politeness and it's perceived as rude when you don't. If you're a first-time visitor, there's no need to be intimidated by the city. There's a stereotype about Paris but I think it's overplayed. The French are lovely people with a great sense of humour, and if you show them that you have the desire to learn, they're happy to help you.

economy; lenders have an avenue to monetize their wardrobes, while borrowers gain access to clothing at a fraction of the retail cost. She notes that the peer-to-peer rental model employed by Rax is 60 per cent more resource-efficient than conventional garment production. “Rax is not just an app; it represents a transformative stride towards a more sustainable and conscientious fashion future,” Marley writes.

SAIF AFTAB, EMBA’19, BSc(Eng)’09, shares that after graduating from Smith he joined Ernst & Young and relocated to Bahrain. Today he is a senior manager in EY’s consulting practice, driving intelligent operations and digital transformation for clients in the energy sector. Saif also got married in 2020. “We now have two kids and continue to call Bahrain home,” he writes.

2020s

PANKAJ PRASOON, EMBA’20, has been busy since finishing the program. He joined Microsoft, where he is senior director of product management; acts as an advisor for ventures in the startup ecosystem; serves on the Digital Marketing Program Advisory Council at California State University, Chico; and has written a soon-to-be published book on purposeful leadership. “From a consultant striving to make a mark to a product leader at Microsoft, an

advisor for startups, an academic contributor and an author, my journey has been exhilarating. It’s a testament to the transformative power of the EMBA Americas program and the myriad opportunities it opens up,” he writes.

KATIE HEGGTVEIT, MMIE’21, tells us she has been inducted into the Toronto Sport Hall of Honour in the Spirit of Sport — Diversity and Inclusion category. In 2017, Katie founded Bootcamps for Change, an organization that delivers fitness programs for youth experiencing homelessness. The organization’s #SweatierForTheBetter program also provides scholarships for shelter youth to become certified fitness instructors and connects them with local job and mentorship opportunities. Katie recently moved to Nashville to pursue her doctorate in Education Leadership and Policy at Vanderbilt University but continues to act as an advisor for the social enterprise.

OSMAN NAQVI, AMBA’21, has been working at Invest in Canada as an advisor in investor services since graduating from Smith. He tells us he recently shared his thoughts on how a business education can be used for social good as part of a TEDxYouth event at Walter Murray Collegiate in Saskatoon.

JACKIE AQUINO, MFin’22, tells us he’s working as a finance director at Power Sustainable, a sustainable alternative asset manager investing in companies and projects with positive outcomes for the environment

and society. In this role, Jackie oversees the finance and operations of the company’s recently launched global and European infrastructure credit platform. Jackie lives in Toronto with his wife Sheryll Anne and their three-year-old daughter Calie.

DANIEL ORTIZ GARCIA, EMBA’23, tells us he recently created a search fund, Noyal Capital, and is looking to acquire and run a company in Mexico. “This is a way of entrepreneurship through acquisition. I’d love to help others who might be interested in following a similar path,” he says. Daniel lives in Monterrey with his wife and two daughters. He says he loves spending time with his family and also plays the piano. “I’m terrible at it. My neighbours know this as well.”

This summer, **ERIC COLONNA, BCom’23,** participated in Kingston Economic Development’s Summer Company. The Ontario government-funded program for entrepreneurs provides participants with hands-on business mentoring from local business leaders and up to \$3,000. Eric’s business, Pick 6 Athletics, is a specialized training program for football players aged 8-19 that zeros in on speed and defensive back

skills, bridging the gap between need and availability in the Kingston area. “Complementing my knowledge gained from Commerce, I’ve learned all of the essentials for starting a business in the Summer Company program,” he says.

NICHOLAS PONARI, MFIT’23, is living in Montreal and has launched a startup, PulseAI. “We’re building an AI CFO to assist small businesses and new founders to manage their cash better, understand their financials and make better decisions,” he says. “We’re transforming the financial planning and analysis space.”

IAN YANG, MFin’23, is chief of staff at a new venture called Gene Bio Medical, a health-care industry ecosystem partner dedicated to the research and development, manufacturing and commercialization of high-precision, low-cost and effective diagnostic technologies. “We are working to revolutionize the health-care industry and improve the lives of people around the world,” he says. Ian and his family live in Vancouver. He welcomed a daughter, Mikaela, in March.

Let your classmates
(and us!) know
what’s new.

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Celebrations

Births, engagements, weddings and other reasons to celebrate. Let Smith Magazine know about your special occasion (and share your photos) at smithqueens.com/alumninotes.

1. **LANA ZHOU, BCom'15**, has welcomed a new baby, Renee Mak, into the family.
2. **EMILY ELDER (DOWSETT), MIB'18**, and her husband, Trevor Elder, welcomed Rylen Foy Elder on April 25.
3. **LUCAS BORGES, MBA'20**, proposed to his girlfriend and classmate **KAITLYN LEMOINE, MBA'20**, on March 23 at Goodes Hall, where the couple first met.
4. **SHANNON LOUGHREY, BCom'14**, and Ryan Abrams, Artsci'14, MSc'16, got married in Prince Edward County last fall, 10 years after they first met at Queen's. Many of their university friends and classmates were present, including **LIANNE GIRARD, BCom'14**; **AMY HOFFMAN, BCom'14**; Jordan Rouse, Artsci'14, MSc'16; Katie Rouse (LaFreniere), BSc(Eng)'15; Jeryes Fares, Artsci'14; Kent Williams, Mus'14, Law'18; and Jessica Williams (Jonker), Mus'14, Ed'15.
5. **CAROLINE HUA, BCom'17**, and Jeremy Ouseley were married on Oct. 9, 2022 in Toronto at Hotel X. The pair currently live in Ottawa.
6. **CICELY DICKSON (JOHNSTON), EMBA'21**, Artsci'12, and her husband, Graham Dickson, welcomed their daughter, Henrietta Hart Dickson, on March 18. Henrietta joins big brother, Charles, who is two-and-a-half years old.
7. **JEREMY ESTABROOKS, BCom'98**, and his wife Amanda are elated to announce the arrival of their fourth child, Aaron Elliot Estabrooks. "His siblings can't wait to show him their favourite New York City playgrounds and pizza restaurants."
8. **ALEXANDER DIMOPOULOS, AMBA'22**, married Alannah Sadler on July 29 in Edmonton. Alex says he's grateful for Alannah's love and support during the AMBA program.



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My new venture

With Toymint, Zoran Kovacevic, EMBA'15, is creating the next generation of collectible toys



My company:

Toymint (toymint.co) is pioneering the intersection of toys and technology, most notably with our recent venture, Minted Teddy, which explores the realm of phygital (physical + digital) experiences in the NFT (non-fungible token) space.

Why I started it:

I've always been fascinated by toys and their impact on kids. Yet, I saw a gap: physical toys were not keeping up with the digital age, and many lacked the sustainability and quality befitting their role in child development. To raise a brighter generation, we need foundational, mindful toys. Toymint and Minted Teddy emerged from this vision by merging digital experiences with enduring, eco-friendly toys, aiming to delight and responsibly enrich young lives.

What niche I'm filling:

Toymint is carving out a unique niche, marrying tangible collectible toys with their digital counterparts, giving collectors a digital asset and a tangible connection to their investment.

Something that didn't work:

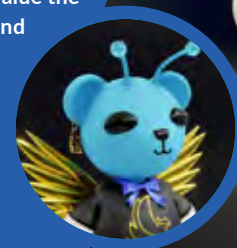
Early on, we got caught up in chasing market trends that, although popular, didn't align with our core mission. It was a valuable lesson in staying true to our long-term purpose and not getting sidetracked by fleeting fads.

What I've learned:

The entrepreneurial journey is filled with highs and lows, but every challenge is a lesson in disguise. Innovating in a rapidly evolving sector like NFTs requires adaptability, continuous learning and, more than anything, a belief in your vision even when the path seems unclear.

My best advice for new entrepreneurs:

Stay curious and stay resilient. Your passion will fuel the long nights and early mornings, but your unwavering belief in the bigger picture will see you through. Also, always remember to value the relationships and networks you build along the way.



MY OTHER CV

THE SWEET LIFE

Karen Flavelle, BCom'79

If you're a chocolate lover (and who isn't), you're probably already well-acquainted with Karen Flavelle's company: Purdys Chocolatier. The retailer and maker of chocolate goes back more than a century; it was purchased by Flavelle's father in 1963. She joined in 1988 after working in consumer packaged goods and marketing. Eventually she became Purdys' owner and CEO.



Where's your hometown?

Vancouver, British Columbia

When you were growing up, what did you want to be?

In Grade 4, I became fascinated with archeology, and so I thought I wanted to be an archeologist.

What was your first job?

A waitress at a pancake house in my neighbourhood at age 14. It was a big moment to be given the responsibility of the cash register after being there a short time.

What's the hardest part about running a chocolate business?

Remaining relevant. Purdys is 116 years old and has seen many changes over those years. Remaining relevant means investing in quality; having the right look and type of packaging; enticing stores; recipes that adopt new flavours or trends, such as a vegan chocolate, no-sugar-added and Asian flavours like matcha and mango; and marketing that reaches the right audience in the right way. It also means shifting to sustainable cocoa, which we started in 2007, and packaging that is biodegradable.

Name one thing that has helped you succeed.

I am passionate about the customer journey. I love listening to customers — by working in our stores, by hearing ideas and suggestions that come through our store teams and by putting myself in the customers' shoes. Similarly, good ideas come from everywhere within the company. I enjoy listening to all who have thoughts to share.

Your career highlight so far is:

Having Purdys be in great shape in 2019, with a good team, a great reputation and growing sales, which enabled us to make it through Covid-19 and thrive going forward.

What's your favourite chocolate?

Since I am now lactose intolerant, Vegan Hawaiian Black Salt Caramels and Vegan Sweet Georgia Browns. And Layer Mints. And Hedgehogs — with a lactose enzyme pill. It's well worth it!

What's your motto?

"Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. When you are tired of saying it, they are just beginning to hear," by Jack Welch. It helped me realize how much communication is needed to get ideas and new actions in motion.

Which trait do you most admire in others?

The combined ability to be both creative/innovative and strongly quantitative. Most people are one or the other.

What's the best advice you ever got?

"Never let three disasters happen at once." For example: a major ERP implementation at the same time as a cyber attack and interest rates doubling. Since two are out of your control, only take on one big project at a time.

Name an historical figure you admire.

Margaret Thatcher. She overcame so many hurdles to become prime minister of the U.K., and then was the longest serving British prime minister of the

20th century. She was clear on where she stood on issues, she tackled many controversial issues with strong, clear leadership and she deeply believed she was making Britain great again.

Who was a favourite professor?

Carl Lawrence was key to the rest of my life. He was the [acting] dean and I wanted to transfer into the Commerce program from languages. He approved my application to switch into business. I can't imagine what my life would have been like if that hadn't happened.

Your favourite all-time book?

Queen of the Desert, which is a biography of an aristocratic Englishwoman named Gertrude Bell, who was the brains behind Lawrence of Arabia. It helped me understand the Arab culture. And the Palestinian frustration.

What are you reading now?

I am going to Egypt in the fall so I am reading *The Heretic Queen* about Nefer-tari who lived in the 1200s BCE. I just finished *Strength to Strength*, a book about living your best life in the second half of your life.

Your favourite all-time movie?

Bohemian Rhapsody. True story and great music.

What do you do when you're not working?

Skiing, cycling, hiking, running and travelling.

What's your idea of perfect happiness?

I love to ski, so a powder day.



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