

SPEECH BY PATRICIA FRASER
on receiving the first
Robert Johnston Work in Culture Award for Exemplary HR Practices
Thursday November 18th 2010

I'm deeply honoured and humbled to receive the inaugural Robert Johnston Award. None of us do what we do for reward, but it's really lovely to be acknowledged for one's work.

I'm especially honoured to be receiving this award because I had the good fortune to work with Bob Johnston in the late 1970's and early 80's through the organization known as CAPDO, the Canadian Association of Professional Dance Organisations. As the young and green Artistic Directors of a very small contemporary company, Dancemakers, Carol Anderson and I found ourselves at the table with the "big guns", The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Les Grands Ballets, and the National Ballet of Canada. I feared the experience would be daunting and the struggle to have our voice heard overwhelming ... but nothing could have been further from the truth, largely due to the generous spirit of the National Ballet's General Manager, Bob Johnston. He extended a welcoming hand, ensured that every idea around the table was valued and every contribution respected. He understood that the larger organizations had a responsibility to support and nurture those functioning on a shoe-string budget. Any onerous administrative task was deftly stick-handled by Bob to the larger organizations who had the infrastructure to accomplish it. He did all kinds of work without ever seeming "put upon" and freed up the rest of us to contribute ideas, energy and enthusiasm. He had an uncanny knack of summarizing the big picture all the while making everyone feel an integral part of the decision-making process. Bob listened to your ideas, trusted everyone without question to do their part, and always gave credit where credit was due ... all in an unassuming, affable, Bob Johnston kind of way. Sounds like an HR role model to me.

None of us do what we do for reward, nor do we do it alone. I would like to thank Michael Jones for nominating me for this award. Michael Jones was an inspired General Manager at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre who revitalised the School and was a treasure to work with. He set a strong and stable course and was able to hand off a more mature and confident organization to Andrea Vagianos who was, and is, a strong advocate for the School, and now to Lauren Gould who, with fresh ideas, is poised to take the School in a new and exciting direction. I've been blessed with great help-mates.

I would also like to thank Peggy Baker and Susan Macpherson who wrote eloquent and touching letters of support for my nomination and who, along with Pat Miner, have been my dear colleagues and friends for over 35 years. Even with inspired colleagues and management it's a challenge to accomplish what needs to be done without the encouragement of a strong Board of Directors. I've been more than lucky in that regard and consider the School's Board to be visionary in its vigorous support of healthy and progressive human resource policies and practice. I'm indebted to the late Kathryn Ash for 17 years of guidance and counsel and I would especially like to thank Louise Smith and our Chair Charles Hain for their constant support.

My family is the centre of my life. My sons, John and Glyn McKinnon, have been long-suffering attendees of more dance concerts than is reasonable to expect, but I believe it has encouraged them in their passion for music and the arts. My husband Peter McKinnon, the light of my life, is a theatre professional and teacher as well. Among many other delights in our lives, we've enjoyed 25 years of spirited discussion about art and the nature of teaching.

I would like to thank the Cultural Careers Council Ontario for this wonderful honour and for its efforts "to increase awareness and understanding of the value of human resource practices". Thank you to Executive Director Diane Davy and Program Manager, Karen Ennis. The CCCO practises what it preaches by engaging staff like them and like Program Director, Susan Cohen, another role model whom I first met when she was Dance Officer at the Ontario Arts Council. In those days it was possible to drop in unannounced and Susan always responded to my "Hi Susan, gotta minute?" with an open door, her undivided attention, and words of encouragement.

In closing I'd like to say this. My vision is probably yours: that all people are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of a cultural, creative existence, opening their lives to what creative endeavour does for the human condition. There is copious evidence that creative, cultural, artistic activity, in schools, in the workplace, and in our communities, makes people likelier to succeed, and to grow up rounded and fulfilled human beings.