



**NORTHERN TIGERS: Building Ethical Canadian Corporate Champions**

Dick Haskayne with Paul Grescoe

With additional contributions from Deborah Yedlin

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# INTRODUCTION

IT WAS LIKE BEING ALIVE and well at a big, cheerful wake following my own funeral. The nearly nine hundred people gathered at the Hyatt Regency in Calgary that evening had come not to bury me, Richard Francis Haskayne, but to praise me. If it was all a bit embarrassing, it was also wonderfully heartening to hear myself eulogized, and occasionally roasted with good humour, to learn what my friends and colleagues really thought of me.

There was some irony, however, in the fact that the institution organizing this tribute was American and even named after the twenty-eighth president of the United States. I was receiving the Woodrow Wilson Award for Corporate Citizenship from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institution. I was one of only five Canadians so honoured. Yet whatever reputation I had with my peers rested in part on my belief that Canada must have many more homegrown, domestically based companies of ambitious scale and scope—the kind of corporations that some people, me included, describe as Northern Tigers.

In nature, according to *The Tiger Handbook*, “Northern tigers live in a colder climate and need a larger body to stay warm” In the jungle of business and industry, size is only one attribute that corporations must have to survive and flourish, both in Canada and the world. I’ve always felt that Canadians should be not only creating but also controlling their own business enterprises, keeping them

headquartered in this country, and building them to be strong and nimble enough to withstand takeover attempts from foreign interests seeking control.

I'd been at the centre of one such takeover not long before, as the last chairman of the lumber giant MacMillan Bloedel of Vancouver. And at the time of my tribute, I was on the board of the American company that had acquired it, Weyerhaeuser of Washington State. Given the circumstances, I was glad to be a director, an insider who might continue to favourably affect the fortunes of the thousands of men and women in Canada who still earned their livelihoods working in our Canadian forests and mills and offices.

I'd been a director of seven other Canadian companies: EnCana Corporation, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Manulife Financial, Hiram Walker Resources, Crestar Energy, Husky Energy, and Royal LePage. As chair or president, I'd also helped run eight other major domestic companies: Hudson's Bay Oil and Gas, Home Oil, Interprovincial Pipe Line, Interhome Energy, NOVA Corporation, TransAlta Corporation, TransCanada Corporation, and Fording Inc. In the chapters that follow, through the lens of my long career, I show how some companies I've been involved with have created sound strategies and executed them wisely to become true corporate champions—Tigers—and how others have failed.

This book is both a memoir and a manifesto—a capitalist manifesto. One of its three major themes is my long-standing plea to raise the bar on ethical behaviour in business. As I said in accepting the Woodrow Wilson Award, “We have entered a time of extreme cynicism that naturally results from a great many widely publicized corporate scandals. Some people are so critical that they suggest the term ‘corporate ethics’ has become an oxymoron.”

Another theme is what I view as the enormous need for private philanthropy—simply the largesse of corporations and governments, but *personal* contributions of time and energy as well

as welcome cash to charitable, social, cultural, and educational institutions.

But the overarching theme is that, in a ruthless global economy, Canadians increasingly need to develop our companies into powerful, influential Northern Tigers that make all the major decisions at home, not in some far-off foreign head office. If we don't, we'll continue to lose a lot more MacMillan Bloedels. I still vividly—and painfully—recall that day in the spring of 1999 when I received a phone call from MacBlo's president, Tom Stephens. I was in no shape to field any unsettling news. My wife, Lois, was trying to shield me from all potentially disturbing communication with the outside world as I recovered at home in Calgary from an emergency heart bypass operation.

I took the call because Tom had recently been brought in to restructure and resurrect the failing west-coast forest giant. It had been rudderless for too many decades and failed to grow through consolidation in a fiercely competitive industry. Now Tom was telling me that an American giant was coveting MacBlo, a widely held Canadian public company. And I was soon sadly aware that even in my three-year role as chairman, I found it difficult to oppose the takeover because of the company's poor stock performance. It was unsettling to preside over the demise of a corporation that had once helped define British Columbia and might one day have evolved into a possible Tiger in the world of forestry.

During my career, I've been front and centre as an unwilling witness to other corporate deaths. But fortunately, I was also involved in many more successes among Canadian companies that exhibit the qualities of the natural world's tigers: strength, nimbleness, single-mindedness, and, perhaps most important of all, a deep respect for their habitat, their home ground.

As for me, my roots are in the nurturing rural community of Gleichen, Alberta, where I was the son of an entrepreneurial couple, met and married my first wife, Lee—and long ago learned the importance of honouring where you come from.