

A portrait of Andrew Go, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue blazer over a pink shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. A green plant is visible on the left side of the frame.

Leader Profile

ANDREW GO

Vice President, Digital Commerce
Metroland Media

with **GLAIN ROBERTS-McCABE**

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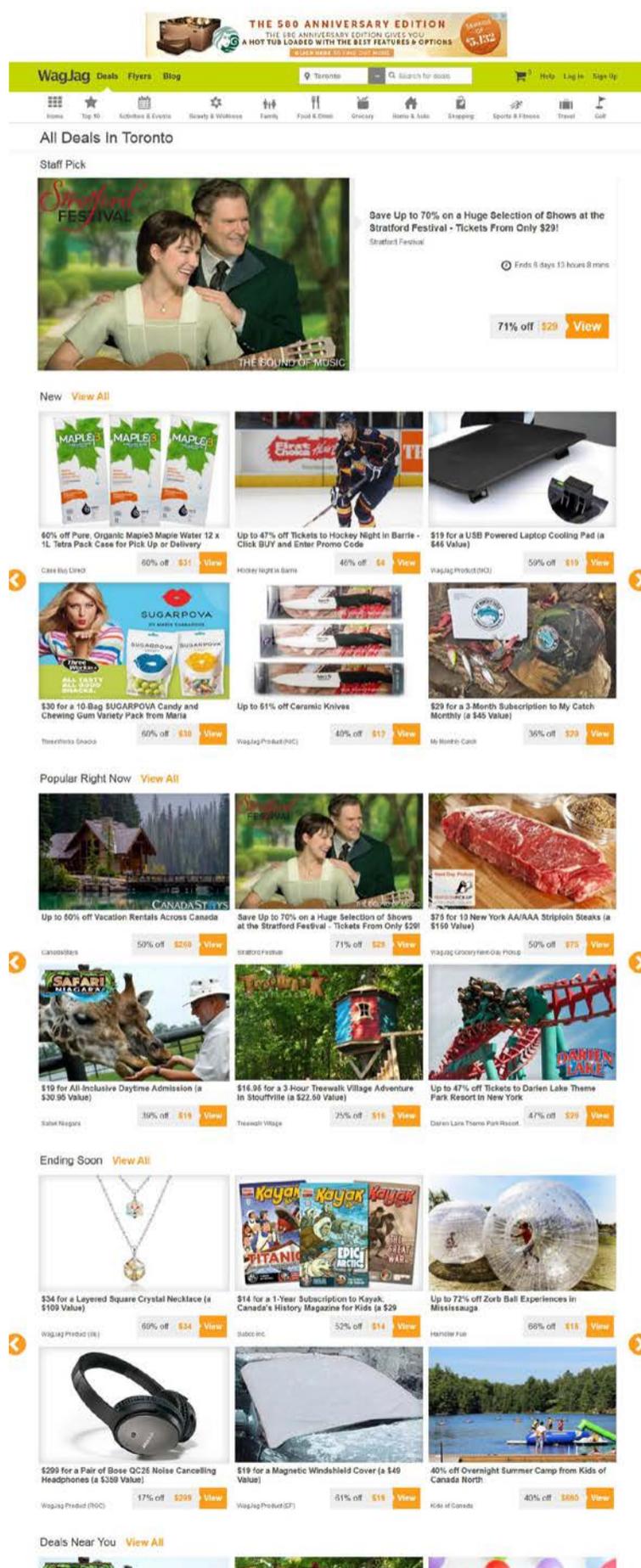
with **GLAIN ROBERTS-McCABE**



Andrew Go is a world-travelling adventurer and an unstoppable force for growth at Torstar Corp, including in his current role as Vice President, Digital Commerce at Metroland Media. An expert at never letting an opportunity or new adventure pass him by, Andrew shares his must-do's for the first thirty days in a new role, his strategies for building culture within teams, and how he survived his most challenging career move.

GRM Set the context for us. Tell us about your current role at Metroland Media and your current focus and priorities.

AG I am presently the Vice President of Digital Commerce for Metroland Media. My primary responsibility is to grow a portfolio of digital businesses: WagJag, the largest Canadian owned deal site; Save.ca, Canada's leader for digital flyers and coupons; Travelalerts.ca, one of Canada's most trusted travel deal aggregators, and Simpofly.com, a new self-serve platform that fulfills advertisers' direct-to-consumer needs, from design to printing to distribution. I am also



WagJag.com screenshot

responsible for identifying new digital business opportunities. This includes a buy, build or partner approach with companies ranging from the local start-up community, to national media conglomerates, to some of the largest international retailers and consumer packaged goods companies.

GRM You've been with Torstar Corp for over twelve years but have held a number of positions within the organization both in Canada and overseas. Where did you start and how did you end up in your current role?

AG Since the beginning of my career up to today, I have been fortunate enough to work with amazing people and lucky to be at the right place at the right time when opportunities presented themselves. After I graduated from the Schulich School of Business with a marketing degree, I started out as a Marketing Coordinator working for Brighter Vision, a children's educational program, which was a small division of Harlequin Enterprises.

After two years, I began working part-time on my MBA at Schulich and moved into Harlequin's Overseas division as an Assistant Product Manager. In this role, I was given an incredible opportunity

to travel around the world, taking on consulting projects for our businesses abroad, while simultaneously looking for and assessing new markets to enter. After launching smaller businesses in Lithuania, Estonia, and Taiwan, I proceeded to do a lot of exploratory work in China, which proved to be very challenging. The Overseas division then turned their eyes to India and after a few trips we decided to launch a wholly-owned venture that I would manage.

For this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I packed up and moved to London, UK, which was my staging ground for the next six months. I then relocated to Mumbai, India for two years where I launched our South Asian interests. When I returned to Canada, I continued to work on international expansion of the business, launching a new business in Russia and Thailand and leading an acquisition in Germany.

During this period, there was a need for a strategy role in our North American Retail Division as Harlequin was undergoing a

Leadership Tip

Taking a risk to try a new opportunity will pay back double in experience and growth.

lot of change with the adoption of eBooks and I was given the opportunity to step into the Director of Retail Strategy role. Over the next few months, I worked closely with the Sales and Marketing teams to identify new opportunities for Harlequin.

My next opportunity was to take over a General Manager role of an online lead generation business called InsuranceHotline.com. In this role, I was charged with managing and growing the operations of the insurance lead-generation business, as well as launching another business, Comparasave.com. However, we were engaged in merger discussions with our competitor and twenty-three months after I joined, we merged. I was then moved to help lead a new division within the Torstar Digital portfolio.

Initially, I was tasked with overseeing marketing, product and operations for the Digital Commerce Group but I soon also took over GM responsibilities. We managed a portfolio of six businesses at the time. Twenty-two months later, the decision to merge Torstar Digital's assets back within the other divisions of Torstar brought me back to Metroland where we added additional businesses to the portfolio.

GRM That's an amazing number of job transitions! Given all the career moves you've made, what's one thing you've learned about moving into any new role? What does your first thirty days typically look like?

AG The main thing I've learned is that relationships are everything. Regardless of how success is defined, it is built on more than just one individual. I spend the first thirty days in any new role talking to as many people as possible. Typically, I focus my conversations around getting to know the person and their role, and their perspective on the state of the business. The questions I like to ask are:

Leadership Tip
Relationships are everything.

- 1) What excites you about working here?
- 2) What is your biggest challenge?
- 3) If you could change one thing what would it be?
- 4) What advice would you give me?

From there, I try to put together a big-picture view of the business, focusing on how to manage people's expectations and how to gain support for long-term success.

GRM Of all the career moves you've made, which one was the most challenging and what did you learn?

AG Taking on the launch of India for Harlequin was very challenging. I had to relocate to two foreign countries without my

family and friends for support. There were also many cultural and business nuances I had to learn to appreciate and understand, sometimes through trial by fire.

The most important lesson I learned was how to adapt and respond to new situations. There were many instances where I had to make quick decisions with limited information. In these situations, I had to trust not only my gut, but also the people and relationships that I had built. In high-pressure situations, it is important to know when and how to slow down a conversation, and to not get trapped in a difficult position. It's almost always better to write a question down and ask for an opportunity to get back to someone with an answer than to make up a vague reply on the spot.

GRM You've been tasked with lots of business startups and turnarounds over the course of your career. Those can be pretty high pressure situations. What advice do you have for leaders who may find themselves having to navigate similarly challenging scenarios?

AG A huge part of managing pressure is how you frame the discussion internally. My observation is that our general inclination in a negotiation is to go right to "what's my perspective?" and, especially if you're feeling under pressure, you often forget to think about how the other party is going to interpret your comments or your actions. This will cause you to narrowly focus on trying to "win" the negotiation on your terms, rather than looking at it as a win-win situation.

The screenshot shows a mobile interface for travelalerts.ca. At the top, the status bar displays 'ROGERS', signal strength, Wi-Fi, time '11:02 AM', location, Bluetooth, and 78% battery. Below the status bar is the 'travelalerts.ca' logo and a blue menu icon. The main content area features a promotional card for 'Punta Cana: All Inclusive Dominican Eco Resort Vacation'. The card includes a photo of a resort building at night with palm trees, a shopping bag icon, the title 'Punta Cana: All Inclusive Dominican Eco Resort Vacation', the dates 'September 18 - 25, 2015', and the provider 'Expedia'. The price is listed as '\$684 w/tax' in large blue text, with a blue 'More Info' button below it.

I've found it serves everyone far better if you balance the interests of both parties, especially in those times when you're under a lot of pressure. When you're considering the other person's perspective, you are far more likely to think your response through, rather than panic and react impulsively.

Leadership Tip

Keep your cool in high pressure situations by focusing on 'win-win' over 'I need to win.'

GRM You're in an industry that's going through massive change, which has certainly accelerated over the course of your career. As a leader, how do you keep your team engaged and motivated through all the uncertainty that exists when industries are in transition?

AG I think it's important to reaffirm the positive things my team is working on and celebrate the wins, no matter how small. This is incredibly important as we look to carve out roles in the world of change. Change can be navigated by being honest and transparent. I find it better to tackle questions and issues head on, and build a culture of accountability, determination and achievement. Part of building this kind of culture is also identifying the different needs and wants within my team. Motivating a multi-generational team requires me to recognize what people's values are, which incentives they will respond to, and how to manage accordingly.

GRM You mention the importance of building a strong culture. That's a hot topic with leaders these days. What are some of the other strategies you use to embed culture within the teams you lead?

AG To make your company's culture known, you have to actually talk about it, embrace it, and lead by example. People need to see what it means beyond words. In the digital space especially, it can be hard to remember that culture is more than dress code or office perks. It's about collaboration, setting goals, and working together as a team to achieve meaningful objectives.

One simple way I reinforce our culture is repetition in different contexts. Our division strives to deliver moments of joy to our consumers, advertisers, and our own teams. To keep that top of mind, I end my bi-weekly meetings with my direct reports by going around the table and asking what their moment of joy was since our last meeting. We also take time to talk about the values at our larger town hall meetings. We set up an acknowledgement program called 'Kudos,' to publicly thank colleagues who demonstrate results that are in line with our values. I find by getting people to talk about the values, you make them real and build a sense of ownership amongst the group to uphold them. Ultimately, it all begins with you as a leader. Leading by example, setting up processes and building values discussions into your actual day-to-day will reinforce the expectations. Consistency and repetition is key.

Leadership Tip

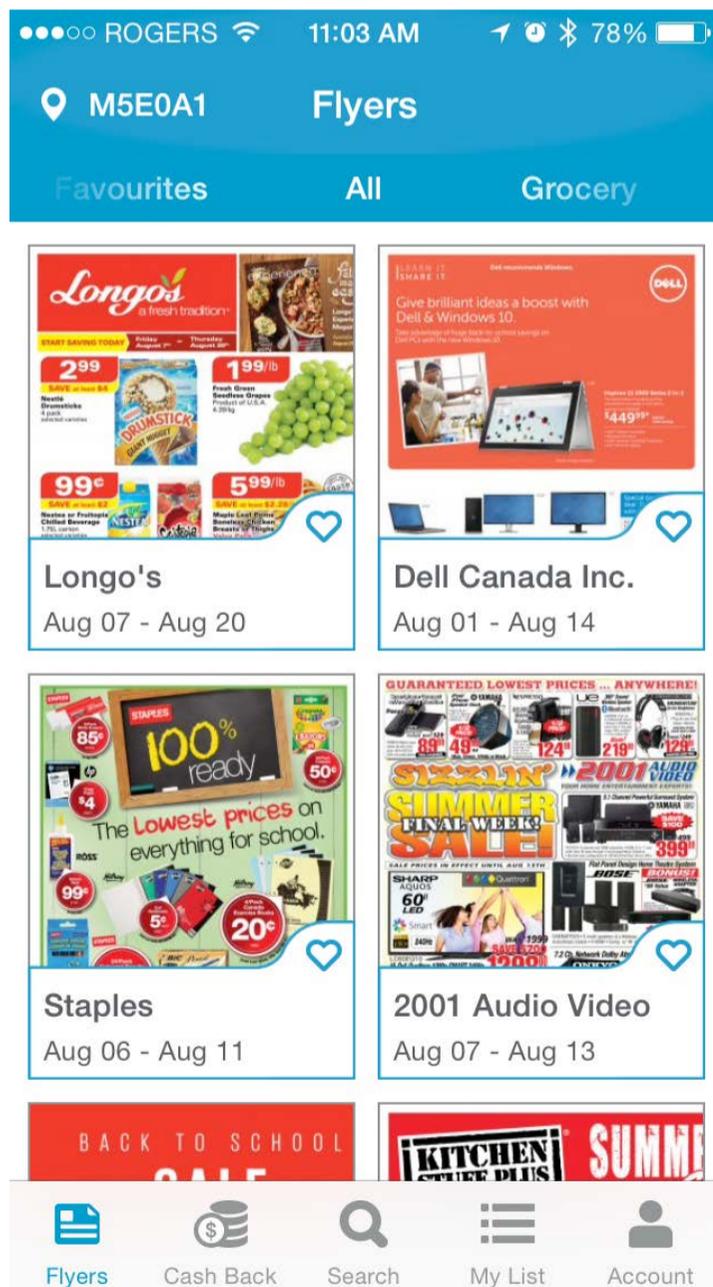
Stay consistent and lead by example to keep your company culture strong.

GRM You're leading "new media" in a predominantly "old media" business under the Torstar Corp. Does this pose any challenges for you as you work and collaborate with other leaders who have grown up in the more traditional media space?

AG I think it goes back to building a level of comfort with change. Change can be very intimidating for many people, even more so when there is the perception that a lot of closed-door discussions are being held. Particularly in a digital environment, the pace of change can really be unnerving. Never before in history have we seen so many companies and industries rise and fall as a result of disruption, proliferation of technology and access to information. Communication and collaboration backed up by strong relationships

at all levels of the organization can help navigate change. I've found that when you frame conversations around understanding and sharing common goals it's easier to earn support.

GRM There's a lot of talk about different generations in the workplace. As one of the youngest members of your management team, how do you make sure your voice is heard at the table? Are there any advantages or drawbacks to being in a different generational cohort than your peers?



Screenshots: [Save.ca](#) mobile app and [Simpofly.com](#)

AG I think regardless of age, it is everyone's own responsibility to find opportunities to make their voices heard. By building relationships with other key stakeholders and understanding their needs and concerns, it becomes easier to contribute thoughtful comments that are insightful for the group and drive the discussion and business forward. For myself, being in a different generation has opened up opportunities for mentoring, as both a mentor or mentee. It is important for anyone's career to find ways to keep improving, and mentoring can provide an opportunity for that.

Leadership Tip

Understand what you and your peers bring to the table as individuals and how those strengths work together.

A challenge with working in a multi-generational workplace is that there are many perspectives to consider, all of the time. For example, not everyone will be in the same life stage as you, and as a result, some of their priorities may not be in line with yours. It takes extra work to find that common ground, on which you can build a successful team.

GRM Throughout your career, you've managed to navigate and adapt into new roles while advancing. What career advice would you give to individuals who are currently starting out?

AG There are four points that I would share with someone just starting their career:

Be open minded and flexible

Opportunities come up for everyone; you just need the right amount of luck to be there and have the courage and readiness to take advantage of them.

Work hard and have grit

Hard work is necessary to move you through the ranks, but also have the grit to see things through. This is especially key when things don't go your way or when you fail. Those are the moments that will define your character and push you to the next level.

Be humble but not timid

Surround yourself with smart people and learn from them. Make your voice heard when you have something important or insightful to say.

Build relationships

Hard work will get you to a senior level, but then appreciate everyone at that level works hard. To take you to the next level, it becomes about the kinds of relationships that you can foster.

GRM Awesome advice to end on. Thank you for your time. **RL**



Glain Roberts-McCabe believes great leaders make the difference and that every leader can be their own kind of great. As Founder and President of The Executive Roundtable Inc., she and her

team inspire great leadership through innovative group, team and individual coaching and mentoring programs.

For more information or to join the Roundtable community visit: TheExecutiveRoundtable.com, connect on Twitter [@ExecRoundtable](https://twitter.com/ExecRoundtable) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ExecRoundtable).

