

A portrait of a man with a red beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit, a light blue striped shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling and looking directly at the camera. A small pin is visible on his lapel.

Leader Profile

JEREMY DIAMOND

Executive Director, The Vimy Foundation

with **GLAIN ROBERTS-McCABE**

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Breathing Fresh Perspectives into Canadian History

When you first meet Jeremy Diamond, Executive Director of The Vimy Foundation, you're struck by two things: his passion and his energy (oh, and he has an amazing sense of style too!). Jeremy has spent his career following a driving purpose to ensure Canada's rich history remains exciting, interactive, and accessible to Canadians - particularly to young people. Under his watch at Historica Canada and now with The Vimy Foundation, Jeremy has been a tireless and vocal advocate for the increase in Canadian history curriculum in schools and popular programming in communities.

As one of Canada's next generation executives, Jeremy brings a fresh team-centric approach to leadership that places an emphasis on engagement and empowerment. I sat down with Jeremy to hear more about how a self-professed history geek leads and motivates a team and group of volunteers to work hard to keep the legacy of Vimy Ridge alive and vibrant for future generations of Canadians.

GRM Jeremy, set the stage for us. Tell us about The Vimy Foundation. What's the mandate and what are your top three priorities as the leader?

JD In short, our goal at The Vimy Foundation is to ensure all Canadians, especially our youth, never forget our country's important role in the First World War, particularly the victory at Vimy, the first battle Canadians fought as a united force in our history.



My three leadership priorities are simple:

- be a leader to my team by encouraging them to be entrepreneurial and creative;
- be a leader to my board by creating ways they can effectively assist management to reach our goals as an organization while keeping them accountable;
- be a leading voice in the Canadian history sector by keeping these important issues top of mind among our citizens.

Leadership Tip

Knowing your priorities allows you to focus and plan on how you can best serve.

GRM What attracted you to the opportunity at Vimy?

JD The opportunity to continue my career goal of creating legacy projects for future generations of Canadians. In this position, I have built, and now lead, a team whose goal it is to develop once-in-a-lifetime initiatives to commemorate key moments in Canadian history. The crown jewel of this opportunity is to build a state-of-the-art Vimy Education Centre in France, to open up in 2017 - 100 years after the famous battle.

Leadership Tip

Know your passion so you can inspire others.

GRM Jeremy, you've accomplished many things over the course of your career, but share with me one or two of your most pivotal leadership moments. What did you learn and how do you feel those experiences shaped you as a leader?

JD Early in my career, when I was appointed program manager, I had the chance to hire my first team. This gave me incredible confidence to decide what kind people that I

Leadership Tip

Hire those who share the same passion and vision.

not only thought could complete the assigned tasks, but who would also be committed to the cause of promoting Canadian history. I am proud to say that some of these team members grew with the organization and currently hold leadership positions of their own. This experience taught me that great leaders are made by their teams.

GRM It sounds, too, like really early on in your career, you had an instinctive feeling that passion was an important key to performance. The focus on recruiting people with a commitment to promoting Canadian history probably allowed you to focus on building capability, not trying to ‘motivate and engage’ people in the cause, since they were already engaged.

JD Absolutely. Some of the first mentors I had in my not-for-profit career helped me realize that my work was not only a ‘job’ but a ‘cause.’ I developed my leadership approach from these people and as I hired larger teams, it was evident that where I would have the most success would be surrounded by those who exhibited the same method to their work. That approach paid dividends for my organizations as the people who were attracted to our work were willing to go ‘the extra mile’ to achieve results and make a difference. I was able to watch them become mentors themselves within their teams, which gave me great satisfaction and made me even more driven in my own career.

GRM I feel like, in my own career, I have plenty of leadership ‘do-over’ moments. What’s one of yours?

JD I wish I would have shown more leadership with a large project that I noticed was having challenges. More direction and guidance from me would have helped the leader of that team be

Leadership Tip
**Take time for self-reflection
and learn from mistakes.**

more effective and made for an improved work environment. I have recently had an opportunity to work again with this individual and that past experience is helping me to be a more effective leader.

GRM Looking back, why do you think you held back on providing more direction? How do you manage that differently today?

JD Lack of confidence in my own judgment, I think. With experience, I have become much more comfortable in giving, and receiving, feedback both in team and board setting. Time and time again I see how that confidence has led to an increased respect from the people with whom I work.

GRM I always say to people that leadership is an ongoing journey. A program or event isn't going to make you a great leader, you have to keep learning and growing. How do you keep your own 'leadership saw' sharp?

JD One of the things I know about myself as a leader, is that I enjoy growing and learning. Because I report to a volunteer Board who have many other things on their agendas, it's really up to me to create some of these experiences for myself. Instead of waiting for leadership opportunities to come to me, I try to anticipate and get out in front of them. For instance, I regularly call small meetings of my Board and staff and present new ideas or initiatives I'd like to try and solicit their feedback - the good, the bad, and the ugly. Although there is an inherent risk to this approach (not liking the feedback!), I find it keeps me engaged and learning. I have also noticed that it has had a positive effect on my team. They now regularly bring me new ideas and I feel it is contributing to the type of entrepreneurial spirit I'm trying to create.

Leadership Tip
**Keep learning and growing.
Leadership development
never stops.**

GRM That's great. I'm a big believer in people creating their own learning opportunities and it sounds like you're really building a culture of open and candid communication. So, in that vein, how do you ensure that you're getting the feedback you need from your team members and Board on your own leadership style approach?

JD To put it simply, ask for it. We spent too much of our career wondering and worrying about what people think or if we are doing a good job. I have never been afraid to speak up and as a result I know what I am excelling in and what still needs some work.

Leadership Tip
Be open to and encourage feedback and the opinions of others.

GRM What other advice do you have for individuals who may not be in a leadership role yet, but are interested in stepping up to the opportunity?

JD Listen to your team. Just because they are not senior members of your organization, they no doubt have great ideas on how to further your mandate or cause. My experience is that when those people are encouraged to present their thoughts, it results in a strong feeling of empowerment and trust.

GRM You're definitely a leader who believes in the power of the collective! And I agree with you on gaining input from less experienced colleagues. I find people who don't have as much experience bring helpful perspectives because they're not as close to the issues as I may be. So, to wrap this up with one last thought, I'm curious, what's one piece of leadership truth that was given to you early in your career that you still lean on today?

JD Trust your instincts. It is natural for many of us to doubt ourselves and find reason why something will not work. Instead, trust that your idea and approach are sound and will have value to your organization and team. Then run with it!

Jeremy Diamond's Key Leadership Truth

Trust your instincts.

GRM I love that! Go forth and make it happen. Thanks Jeremy. **RL**



Youth from Canada in front of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial, Vimy Ridge, France. ©The Vimy Foundation



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.

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