

Morley Gunderson 2019 acceptance speech

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Friends, family, colleagues. Good afternoon. When I got the email from Rafael with the subject line “2019 Morley Gunderson Prize Award Winner”, I opened it eagerly, assuming that since he’d written to me directly, it was someone I’d know, someone I’d gone to school with, one of my many distinguished classmates - like Rafael himself. Imagine my surprise, then, when I realized it was me.

I assure you that this is not false humility, but rather, acknowledgement of the fact that my career has not followed the traditional trajectory of graduates of this amazing program that I was extremely privileged to attend.

My co-recipient Jeanette May’s award makes total sense to me. I am honoured to receive this prize along with Jeannette, who put her MIRHR to good use as Director of Human Resources for the Toronto Police.

And to follow others who, like Jeannette, have had truly impressive careers in industrial relations, people like last year’s winner Rod Cook, like Maurice Mazzerolle, who taught me 22 years ago, like David Doorey, and Brad James and Alex Dagg.

I, on the other hand, have not worked in industrial relations for many years, but as I digested the news, I realized what I’ve actually always known.

Any success I’ve had in my career has been due, in large part, to the education I received at the Centre for Industrial Relations, the academic rigour, the theoretical and practical foundations for understanding the world of work, the brilliant professors and equally brilliant students.

I owe it to Doug Hyatt, who told us that we only needed high school math to understand microeconomics, and when my shoulders slumped in defeat because I’d dropped math after grade 10, showed me patience and compassion.

And to Jeffrey Reitz, who told us about the complex relationships that make up networks.

To John Kervin, who helped me understand issues management and the importance of key messaging when my final research project with my friend Edward Faultless and Brian Dick went horribly awry. As you can imagine, this came in very handy on more than one occasion while I was managing TTC's corporate communications.

To Bob Rae, who taught right after he lost the election. Bob Rae not only had the best guest speakers and so much knowledge to share, he also took the time to phone my mother, a lifelong NDPer, to wish her a happy birthday. Having said that, he didn't give me a very good grade.

To the late Noah Meltz, who explained the complex theory behind it all while somehow making me wish he was my Zaidy.

To Professor Gunderson himself, who was Director when I was a student, but who also managed to make me understand Labour Market economics.

And to everyone at the Centre who helped me get through a tough degree while I struggled with severe anxiety and panic attacks in the 90s when not every school had programs in place to help students with mental health issues.

But I also owe a debt of gratitude to my family, who did not let me give up, to my late mother-in-law who was the first to tell me to just fake it till I make it (which, by the way, I'm pretty sure I still do every day), to my ex-husband literally sat outside exam rooms when I was too anxious to go by myself. To my mom, who derived great joy out of my career even while admitting she had no idea what it was I did. To my brothers and sisters, who are here celebrating me today and have been every single day of my life. And to my kids, Rachel and David, who have inspired me in everything I do. I am humbled, I am grateful, and I am so very proud to receive this award. Thank you.