



Great leaders leave a mark

WE RECENTLY EXPERIENCED THE loss of two great leaders: RNAO former President Joan Lesmond and Canada's NDP Leader Jack Layton. In their own unique ways, both made significant and important contributions to the lives of people. Many of you had the privilege of knowing Joan personally. All who knew her were touched by the depth of her humanity and by her generosity. Joan had a presence, an elegance and grace. These, combined with her compassion, caring, commitment and vision, made her an extraordinary person and leader. I know that each of you will remember Joan in a unique and personal way, and that you will cherish those memories.

All of us were also touched directly or indirectly by the life of Jack Layton. He had an energy, a commitment and compassion for equity and social justice, as well as an extraordinary ability to connect with people as individuals and as a nation. Jack was always fighting to improve the lives of everyday Canadians—people like you and I.

How can we try to move forward as individuals and organizations when we lose extraordinary individuals, extraordinary leaders?

As I think about what I knew of the lives lived by Joan and Jack, it strikes me that both put others ahead of themselves. Joan once said: "It's my promise to the nurses of Ontario, and to the clients we all serve, that I will be a messenger for the

marginalized." Her strong value of service was also reflected in her value of giving: "Yes, charity begins at home, but it doesn't end there."

Joan and Jack embodied the principles of what has been described in literature as *servant leadership*: leading for the primary purpose of serving and inspiring others to achieve their full potential. Both had an inclu-

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sive and collaborative approach. Both created relationships with individuals and organizations that were built on integrity, trust, reciprocity and respect. They had an incredible ability to inspire and encourage others, coupled with an endless supply of energy, a positive outlook, and a fearless attitude toward challenge. It's ironic that both faced their own personal fights with cancer, and up to the very end, never lost their fearless nature.

Joan and Jack also shared a passion for the principles of a publicly funded, not-for-profit health-care system that is so important to us at RNAO and to Canadians in general. Joan was present on Parliament Hill in 2004 when the country's first health accord was being negotiated by federal and provincial

politicians. During the federal election in May, Jack campaigned for a stronger health-care system that would see more nurses and doctors hired and additional investments in home-care services to help the elderly live comfortably at home but still get the care they needed. Both believed that strengthening our system was the best way to sustain it.

While Joan encouraged individual nurses and a whole nursing community to give and grow; Jack urged an entire nation to give and grow in order to become a more just society. Joan often said that "positive work and energy is what has driven me...and reassures me that there is only more great work to be done." In his letter to Canadians (released shortly after his death), Jack had a special message to youth: "All my life I have worked to make things better. Hope and optimism have defined my political career, and I continue to be hopeful and optimistic about Canada. Young people have been a great source of inspiration for me."

I know when I think of great leaders, their influence is not about the power they wield or

the ability they have to accumulate or distribute wealth. Like Joan and Jack, great leaders influence through their ability to serve, and to make a difference in the lives of those around them.

As we move forward and grow from this loss, Joan and Jack's words of wisdom and their courageous actions will illuminate our paths. Theirs is a legacy that will endure; a legacy from which we must continue to build. Let's remember Jack's formidable message to us all: "My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world." **RN**

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RNAO and Saint Elizabeth Health Care are establishing a graduate level scholarship focusing on diversity studies in Joan Lesmond's honour. For more information please contact mzych@RNAO.org.