

“When you get to the fork in the road, take it”

Yogi Berra

The passage of Labour Day represents the end of the summer academic hiatus. I hope that everyone got a chance to enjoy what matters most to them over the past two and half months. From the above quote, you can surmise that Yogi Berra will be one of two quote masters for our weekly Departmental Acknowledgements for 2014-2015.

Our first Departmental Acknowledgement is a bittersweet one for I. It is so well deserved, but is timed to mark the retirement of a Departmental institution and rock on September 12th. It goes to **Sylvie Sahyoun**, my current administrative assistant.

I have decided to reprint in toto below my reference letter for Sylvie. I hope that I have accurately captured our collective feelings from my own individual perspective.

“I have directly worked with Sylvie since my term as Chair of the Department of Pediatrics at McGill and Pediatrician-in Chief of the Montreal Children’s Hospital commenced on November 1st 2011. Sylvie came with the job as she has been the administrative assistant for these roles since 2002. Before that, from 1987-1995 she had worked for the Executive Director of the MCH (Dr Nicolas Steinmetz) and from 1995 with the planning office of the McGill University Health Centre, where along with Nick she was the very first employee of what would grow into a 1.3 Billion dollar construction project featuring massive health care re-organization only just now nearing completion.

Having worked closely on a daily basis with Sylvie for close to three years her numerous qualities have become readily apparent to me. She is at all times kind, efficient, thorough, organized and independent with a softness and ease at inter-personal interactions. She always holds herself accountable and always gets the job done. She is able to see the ‘big picture’ and grasp the complex interactions that exist in a large university hospital and academic setting. She is also always a huge and intelligent repository of advice and institutional history, which she offers at all times in her understated and deferential manner. She frequently provides sage and wise counsel. She quite well tolerated my own learning curve for two jobs that didn’t come with a playbook or a manual of user instructions. She is fluent in at least 4 languages (French, English, Arabic, Spanish) and her professional training as a translator has been an enormous resource in facilitating our external communications.

Sylvie has had three 'bosses' during her almost 30 years at our institution (Nick Steinmetz, Harvey Guyda and myself). While each of us have vastly different personalities, we all share a hard driving "get it done today" work ethic. Sylvie has consistently met this high bar with tolerance, class and the utmost of discretion in a setting filled with the need for respect and collegiality.

A unique, not in the job description, aspect of her work has been the open chair that sits by her desk. I, together with Nick and Harvey, have witnessed many staff and Departmental members sit in that chair and have a heartfelt personal discussion with Sylvie. They come often with slumped shoulders and leave a little bit lighter. More than one of us has observed she is our unofficial psychotherapist.

I am writing this reference letter with regret and sadness. It would be my hope to have done my entire term with Sylvie. I and my entire Department and staff will miss her deeply. Anyone fortunate to hire her will reap a bountiful crop. She really is a polished diamond that is all too rare in our workplaces."

Please do take the time to drop by and say goodbye to Sylvie in person. If you feel the need, draw up the chair for one last therapy session. No charge as always.

Have a great weekend everyone!

Michael