

INSPIRATION

Chris Brown

The best leadership is by example, and Brown lives this mantra—both on the court and in his pension work

By Neil Faba

When coach Chris Brown steps onto the basketball court, he's not only concerned with leading his team to victory, he's also playing for the future. Brown, the current president of the Association of Canadian Pension Management (ACPM) and managing partner at Spectrum HR Law in Calgary, turned to coaching youth basketball in order to be able to spend more time with his two sons, ages 11 and 14.

While he relishes the ability to spend non-work hours with his children and help them build skills in a sport they love, Brown knows he's offering the team more than just competition. "It's quite a fulfilling activity beyond simply spending time with my family. Once you get into it, you realize that the things kids can learn from playing team sports translate really well into life—things like hard work, dedication, perseverance and teamwork."

Those qualities are key to every activity that Brown undertakes, both in his day job and in his extracurricular work to improve the Canadian pension landscape for current and future generations.

In pension reform, as in coaching, Brown says the best way to push for change is to lead by example. That was the impetus behind Brown's involvement with ACPM and his position as co-chair (with his Spectrum HR Law partner, Scott Sweatman) of the Alberta-British Columbia Joint Expert Panel on Pension Standards (JEPPS), whose 2008 report recommended changes to the pension system including the creation of an interprovincial DC plan that would be made available to employees in both provinces.

"I have always thought it important that, rather than just practising [pension law], you serve your clients by getting involved in the issues as well and advocating for solutions."

And while the pace of change can be slow—to date, the solutions recommended by the JEPPS panel haven't been

implemented—the work has allowed Brown to build relationships with like-minded industry professionals.

"A lot of people have great things to bring to the table, and they need to be given the opportunity to do that. When you get people with that kind of passion and commitment, solutions are usually not that hard to find."


He's also encouraged by the fact that governments across Canada are beginning to approach the pension problem from a unified front—a spirit evident in recent initiatives such as the pooled registered pension plan and the recommendations from the Task Force on Financial Literacy. Brown says legislative solutions such as these are needed to set the stage for private sector-led innovation.

"Government's role, in my mind, is to address the challenges that have been created by current legislation and then leave it to the private sector to come together for creative solutions that will work in particular contexts. Without that kind of creative thinking, we're no better off."

Brown's eldest son believes he's destined to be the next Stephen Harper rather than the second coming of Michael

Jordan. For Brown, the notion that his son may one day be tasked with leading future generations into their retirement years makes the reform he's shooting for today that much more important.

"The things kids can learn from playing team sports translate really well into life—things like hard work, dedication, perseverance and teamwork"

Scott [Sweatman] that if we do our jobs right, both in working with our clients and in the pension reform work that's going on, we'll put ourselves out of business some day. And that's not a bad thing, because that'll mean the problems will have been fixed." 

Neil Faba is associate editor of *Benefits Canada*. neil.faba@rci.rogers.com

