

It's The Little Things In Life That Count

General Interest | Litigation | Litigation & Dispute Resolution | Politics | Toronto | Toronto Politics

15 June 2016

Many people have asked me what it was like to be the lawyer for former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford. Rob's recent passing left those who knew and supported him saddened and those who did not confounded as to what it was about Rob that had such an impact on so many. Rob had many detractors and none of them could understand how anyone could possibly like and support him. One thing all will agree on, however, was that Rob got a reaction from people. Precious few were agnostic in regard to Rob Ford. Those who disliked him simply could not and likely still cannot fathom how anyone could support him. Some would take their issues with Rob before the Courts. My sense was that many in the media and those who saw themselves as part of the intelligentsia of Toronto, simply could not comprehend what it was about Rob that appealed to so many of their fellow citizens. To them, Rob was not only a lousy Mayor, Rob was a truly terrible person. I found the almost visceral hatred that these apparently intelligent and dignified people displayed hard to understand.

One incident will, however, always stick out in my mind and explained a great deal to me about Rob's massive appeal and maybe some of his detractors will gain some insight from it.

My partner [Stephen Thiele](#) and I represented Rob when he was sued for \$6 Million by the disgruntled owner of a Beaches restaurant who felt he had been defamed by Rob. The case went to trial at the height of 'Ford mania' both in Toronto and internationally. In my career I had never been involved in a case that attracted so much media attention. The Courtroom was packed with reporters every day who reported on even the most minute details of the proceedings. It was truly a show trial and for a civil lawsuit, probably the most widely reported civil trial that I can recall. Certainly the media attention was wholly disproportional to the merit and importance of the matters in issue. At that time, however, everything to do with Rob Ford was front page news and millions followed this proceeding as they did every other detail of Rob's personal and political life.

Despite the mythical stories of paperless offices and legal proceedings, civil trials still do, unfortunately, certainly take up a lot of paper. At the outset of such proceedings many will have seen students and lawyers wheeling up boxes of documents and briefs to the various Courthouses around Osgoode Hall at Queen and University. These boxes are dutifully trundled to the courtroom unpacked and then their contents often strewn hither and yon in the pitch of the courtroom battle. By the end of the trial all those documents and often many more that have been produced during the currency of the proceedings are dutifully bundled up and trundled back to law offices from Courthouses to be re-organized in the event there is an appeal or the proceeding somehow needs to be re-visited. This case was no different and at the end of the trial myriads of briefs, casebooks and documents had to be re-packed into the boxes and schlepped back to the office.

When the trial before the Hon. Justice MacDonald concluded, the media thronged around Rob looking for comment or some further item of interest. Rob really didn't pay much attention to them. He was at that moment probably the most famous (some would say notorious but in this day and age that distinction seems to have become rather blurred) Canadian on the planet. News stories about him and the proceedings had turned up from as far away as Africa and Australia but Rob didn't seem to pay much attention to all the hoopla. Rob really just didn't seem to notice.

It was when we started the inevitably tedious task of putting away all of the materials and lugging the boxes of documents back to the office that I saw Rob in a new light and I think I got a glimpse of the reason for his mass appeal. Lugging back case materials was always my least favourite aspect of litigation. The boxes were heavy and at the end of a case you are generally worn out. The last thing one wanted to do was pack and carry boxes. But it had to be done. While I hated this job, clients usually left the lawyers to it and made them earn their hourly rates with a little manual labour. Not so Rob Ford.

When the trial ended and we started to pack up the materials with an articling student and associate from the office to help with the chore, Rob didn't miss a beat. He immediately started packing up the materials into the boxes and lugging them onto the cart. He ignored the bleating requests from the media and set to

Gardiner Roberts

Bay Adelaide Centre — East Tower
22 Adelaide Street West, Suite 3600
Toronto, ON M5H 4E3

Phone: 416.865.6600
Fax: 416.865.6636
contactGR@grllp.com

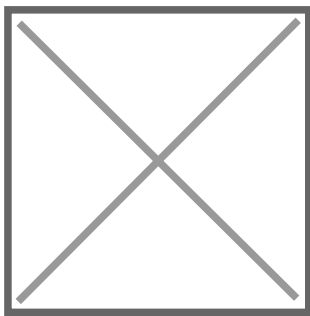
the task at hand. I was floored. The Mayor of Canada's largest City was ignoring the media and instead helping his lawyers pack up and lug boxes. The thought of a politician missing a photo op or opportunity to pontificate to the media is difficult to imagine. That's when it dawned on me what all the hoopla was about. It was pretty simple really, Rob was the guy who helped with the boxes. He didn't plan it and it wasn't an act for the cameras – there was nothing phony or contrived about it. He did it naturally and without any pretence whatsoever and I think that's why people loved him.

Many will criticize Rob as time passes and the usual period of faux respect by his critics fades. Whether that criticism is deserved or not is not for me to say. I know, however, that regardless of all the critics Rob to me was the genuine article. It wasn't beneath him to lug boxes; in fact, it was his first thought to pitch in. While any other politician would have glommed onto the cameras and the media Rob helped lug the boxes.

I'm sure that many who hear this story will think it a rather silly and insignificant thing and they are undoubtedly right. Politicians should be focussed on more important issues than manual labour. The outpouring of stories from everyday citizens about Rob helping them with this or that or simply returning their phone calls was a little overwhelming following his recent death. In that courtroom Rob reminded me that it's the little things that you do for people that they remember if it's done from the right place; like lifting the boxes.

(This blog is provided for educational purposes only, and does not necessarily reflect the views of Gardiner Roberts LLP).

Author



Gavin J. Tighe, K.C.

Partner and Co-Chair of the Litigation and Dispute Resolution Group

416.865.6664

gtighe@grllp.com