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June 18, 2011

Joe Fiorito

Welcome aboard.

Let's get a couple of quick things out of the way: some of you are the Big Guy's little pets, and one of you failed to ride into office on his coattails.

But all of you have big resumés, and most of you seem smart. I hope that means you have the spines to stand on your own two feet.

You are not on the board of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to do Rob's bidding. You also work for, and are accountable to, the 60 per cent of the people who did not vote for him.

Most importantly, however, you work for the 164,000 people who actually live in housing. Some are old. Some are disabled. Some can't work. Some need help to get along. Many have jobs. Lots don't speak English.

All of them are taxpayers.

Here's Job Two, and it's closely related: Board members in the past have been discouraged from entering public housing.

Why that was so is a mystery to me; how the hell can you manage an operation if you've never seen what it is you're managing, or for whom you manage? I'm asking you to break precedent.

Get out there. Meet the people. Ask questions. Find out what it's like to live without an elevator, to breathe mould, to share a kitchen with roaches, to be eaten by bedbugs all night long.

By the way, when you do visit, ask the people whose homes you manage how they'd fix things. You might be surprised by what they have to

say. You're capable of being surprised, yes?

So find out why the [fire at 200 Wellesley](#) happened; then ask if enough is being done to prevent a similar tragedy.

Oh, and ask how it is that one of the dumpsters out back was set ablaze the other day.

Here's another important question: why does 200 Wellesley — the biggest single social housing complex in the country — have such lousy security? Anybody can waltz in there at any time.

If the drug dealers can do it, you can, too.

And then, after you've looked around, tell me if it isn't ironic that, to enter TCHC headquarters, you have to pass security.

Sauce, goose, gander?

Before you take up your duties, make sure to read the [LeSage Report](#), as it relates to the elderly and the policy of noneviction; find out why the report was commissioned; ask what changes have been made.

Then ask tenants if anything has changed. And then ask staff when the hell TCHC is going to get around to appointing a tenant ombudsman, which to my mind is the chief virtue of the report.

Look, I know Case Ootes laid down the law before he left. He is a swell guy, but on the subject of community housing he can't tell the part of his body that bends his arm from the part of his body he sits down on.

You cannot sell a single unit of geared-to-income housing without replacing it; that's the law.

But hey, you knew that.

A couple of things in closing:

You might not like to hear this, but you owe a debt to [Keiko Nakamura](#). She was not in the top job long, but she had the guts to prune a lot of deadwood before Rob dumped her.

She did you a favour.

Finally, I caution you to pay careful attention to the two tenant members of the board. Catherine Wilkinson is the closest thing you have to institutional memory. And [Munira Abukar](#) may be just a kid, but you patronize her at your peril.

I have more to say, but no more space to say it. You'll hear more from me as time goes by.

Best luck.

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