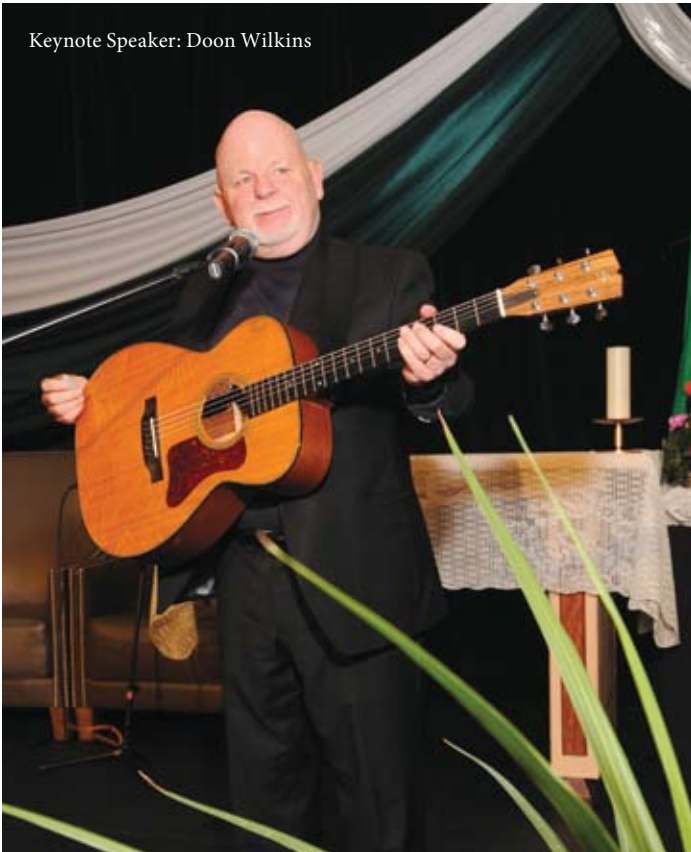


# L.A.U.G.H.

## IF LIFE IS A MAZE, YOU ARE AMAZING

Keynote Speaker: Doon Wilkins



**Doon Wilkins** entertained conference participants with his humour, stories and song. He has been delivering keynote addresses, presenting at conferences and conducting workshops in the field of business, education, human development and health care since 1992. His audiences range from 10 to 10,000 and he has worked around the world. His extensive travels have broadened his outlook, heightened his sensitivity to much of human nature and given a unique perspective to his talks. He is trained as a teacher and seasoned by years of work with educators; Doon can achieve rapport with virtually any audience. He is a talented and accomplished musician, singer, storyteller and comedian. In 1992, he received the Toastmaster's Bronze Award for public speaking. He honoured CPCO with his very last speaking engagement, as he announced his retirement.

Doon opened the address with a song *I am in a hurry to get things done! I rush and rush until life is no fun!* Teaching is a peculiar profession. In the 40 years that he has been in education, he notes that we have never been sufficiently funded. Professional development is seen as a privilege rather than a responsibility and a right. In the long haul, we do what we do from a sense of deep compassion and love. He asked the question, "What are the qualities of those people who seem to stay inspired, on top of things, excited about what they are doing after 15 to 20 plus years of service?"

Doon interviewed staffs to find out who are the heroes in their school culture that have been in education for 15 plus years and are still excited about their work. He decided to do a longitudinal study that has shaped his presentations. Doon asked, "Who are the people you go to when the going is rough? Who are the voices that you listen to?" He found that the answers varied, including principals, colleagues, teachers, the guidance secretary, the custodian etc. In interviewing these people, he identified five common characteristics that heroes shared: the ability to **L.A.U.G.H.**

### **L**ive with intention

These people always had a higher faith power. They all had a deeper anchor to which they gravitated and returned to on an on-going basis. They had the ability to tie faith together with every day practice. They were able to take it up a notch every day. How do we pull ourselves up a notch every day? Doon suggested a phrase of the day. He has kept a journal every day for the past 18 years. He writes about his speech, music, humour and learning. He acknowledges ordinary heroes, those sitting in the audience, stumbling towards enlightenment. He also suggested a word of the day. By beginning each day with a phrase or a word on which to focus, the rest of the day becomes one long experiment. The next day assess how it went. This creates an intention or focus; it creates purpose and becomes a process of adaption or learning. We tend to act on what we highlight.

### **A**cknowledge imperfection

The reality of everyday life can drive you crazy. We need to recognize that things happen, over which we have little control. We need to keep things in perspective and ask the questions:

Who? What? When? Where? and How?, but not belabour the “Why?” Doon gave an example of the ultimate day from hell story that happened to one of the people he interviewed. This happened on the first day in a new school as a vice-principal. A male teacher who taught physical education came in not feeling well and looking just gray. During a Grade 5 class, he sat down on the edge of the stage, fell off and died. A student who had been in his class the year before said she knew what he is doing. “He does this when he wants to get our attention. We take him and drag him around the gym.” The students did and when he was not getting up, they dragged him all the way to the office. When the RCMP arrived they wanted to know what he was doing in the office, if he died in the gym? When the vice-principal got home that evening, her husband asked, “Well, how was your first day?”

## Unique life-long learners

Those he interviewed never stop learning. Doon stated that the longer we are at this profession, the more likely we will buy out of learning. We need to intentionally keep learning. He suggested four steps: self-talk; social confirmation; practise; and payoff. We talk ourselves in and out of new learning so quickly that we do not even recognize the conversation. For social confirmation, we check with our friends. He asked, “With whom do you surround yourself on a long-term basis? Doon suggested that we surround ourselves with those who support our learning. Practice makes amateurs of us all initially, but we need to go back repeatedly, until we get it right. The payoff does not happen unless we surround ourselves with people who support our learning. Life-long learning is one of the strongest markers of those who are still excited after years in education. Doon stated:

*We have windows of time and they open and close. Life is bigger than our work. Life is happening. Opportunity comes and it goes unless we seize it.*

## Gage your stress

All of the educators who last and last acknowledged that stress can accrue in a profession such as ours, but they all had a means to manage their stress. Some worked out. Others talked to a friend. Many had a spiritual practice. Doon advised us to put our stress on a Richter scale from nine to one. He suggested nine might be the death of a family member or friend; seven, losing a job; five, a home break-in; three, an argument with a spouse; and one, having a flat tire and being late for work. When something goes wrong, it always appears to be a nine until we evaluate where it lies on the Richter stress scale.

## Humour/Heart

Doon spoke of one of his personal heroes, a good friend and colleague, who died of cancer. In his final days, he called on each of his friends to visit. When Doon arrived, he said, that he knew what Doon wanted to ask him. “What would you do, if you had it to do over again?” He said, on your deathbed, you would remember three things: whom you loved; the small daily differences that you made in kids’ lives; and when you laughed the most. Doon advised that we tell those we love more often. His

friend had won teaching awards, yet it was those students that came back and thanked him for being hard on them or giving them a break that he remembered. “The kid is bigger than the problem.” He then relived an incident that involved Doon and motorcycles in the inauguration of a new gym at their school. They laughed about the mishaps of their Blues Brothers impersonations. Doon stated that this is what his best friend talked about two days before he left the planet! He urged us, “Do it now! The person is bigger than the problem. The small daily differences are important.”

Doon ended by thanking us for making his last presentation a nostalgic one and said it was a treasure and a pleasure to play for educators who are so close to his heart. He encouraged us to advise new teachers to keep a journal, to acknowledge that education is an up and down journey, and to remember to l.a.u.g.h. every day!

His final words were to the tune of The Wanderer:

*Well I am the kind of principal that likes to walk around.  
I am never in my office. I go upstairs and down. When they ask me which department is the best, I tear off my shirt, the mission statement is on my chest. They call me the principal. They call me the principal. I roam around, around, around, around.*



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