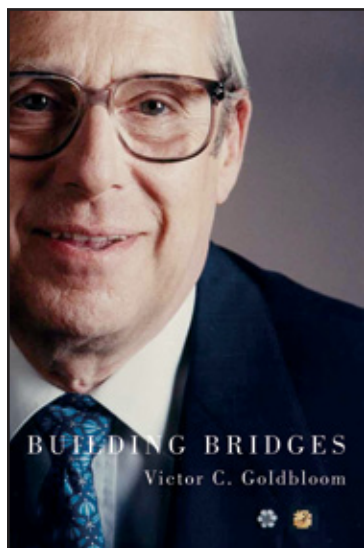


Over the years, his notoriety faded—until this reminder of greatness from his son. Like his father, David couples deft writing with a willingness to do his homework, even when it involves painful revelations about the brilliant but flawed father he so clearly loved. Matthew, based on his own often searingly honest work, would have likely approved. Like father, then, like son. In the best of ways, they deserve each other. There can be no better tribute to Matthew Halton than this superb book. **P**

Contributing Writer Anthony Wilson-Smith, former editor of Maclean's, is President and CEO of Historica Canada.



A Gentleman in Politics

Victor Goldbloom

Building Bridges. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.

Review by Antonia Maioni

History often tends to overlook the quiet builders, those whose contributions solved many pressing problems in crucial transition periods, and whose life-long commitment to public service made a difference to future generations. In Québec, Victor Goldbloom was one of those quiet builders, and a real gentleman in politics. His aptly titled book, *Building Bridges*, reminds us of the significant and lasting impact he and those like him can have in our societies

The Goldblooms are, in fact, a well-known Montreal family: you can find the name of pediatrician Alton Goldbloom (father of Victor) inscribed in the medical faculty's Strathcona Hall at McGill University; and for many years the name of publisher Michael Goldbloom (son of Victor) displayed under the masthead of the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Toronto Star*. But within this illustrious family, it is Victor Goldbloom himself who has had the most remarkable impact on political life in Quebec—and Canada.

In this memoir, written as both a chronological narrative and a series of vignettes and speeches, Dr. Goldbloom reminds us of why this is so. A man whose career spanned the last half of the 20th century, he was destined to follow in his father's footsteps as a pediatrician. His stories of his training and practice are an absolute delight—not only for the informative forays into medical history, but even more because they illustrate the often forgotten art of empathy in the medical profession. Dr. Goldbloom's bedside manner shines through as he *cares* for children and identifies what researchers today would call the “social determinants of health” in simply observing and understanding the family situation of his young and vulnerable patients.

For Dr. Goldbloom, however, fate intervened to provide an alternative career path. As the Quiet Revolution transformed Quebec society, health care became a key element of its policy agenda. As part of the profession's leadership (a role that already involved a considerable amount of bridge-building between linguistic groups and medical specialties), he became engaged in the political process and was persuaded to run for office. Today's Trudeau-watchers may be interested to know that he was first tapped to run in the riding of Mount Royal (traditionally considered a seat for a member of the Jewish community) for the Liberal Party of Canada, but lost that nomination battle to Pierre Trudeau in 1965. Goldbloom's honest account is not at all bitter; nevertheless, it does not paint a particularly pretty picture of partisan politics nor the machinations for which the federal Liberals are well known.

Instead, “Docteur” Goldbloom became a member of the Quebec Liberal team, winning the riding of D'Arcy McGee as an opposition backbencher in 1966 and eventually as a member of Robert Bourassa's provincial government in 1970. Here again, Goldbloom provides an unvarnished account of his years in office, including the dramatic events of

the October Crisis, the controversy surrounding language laws, and insights into many Quebec political figures. Goldbloom also unpacks some of the decisions that were strategically risky for his political prospects, but dictated by his ingrained sense to “do the right thing”, a concept that seems to elude many modern-day successors.

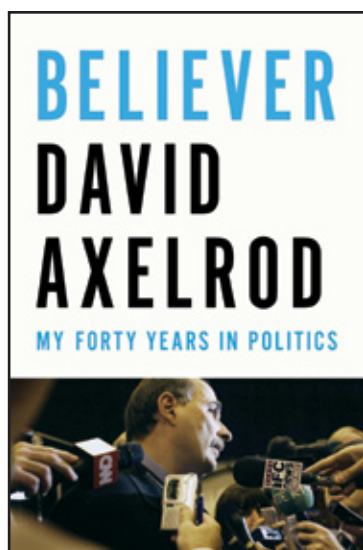
“Goldbloom provides an unvarnished account of his years in office, including the dramatic events of the October Crisis, the controversy surrounding language laws, and insights into many Quebec political figures.”

While in office, Dr. Goldbloom did a great deal of bridge-building in the metaphorical sense—as a representative of the English-speaking language minority, as the first Quebec cabinet member of the Jewish faith—but he was also a builder in a very practical sense, too. He carried the first portfolio related to the environment in 1970, at a time when much too little attention was paid to these issues, thus carving the path for future interventions. And, as minister of municipal affairs, Goldbloom literally took in hand one of the most challenging projects in Quebec's history—the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympic Games—whose preparations were on the cusp of disaster.

After his tenure in political office, Dr. Goldbloom was persuaded to move on to the national scene, turning bridge building into an art form through his leadership of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, and then as the Commissioner of Official Languages. Goldbloom makes no bones about the realities of anti-Semitism and linguistic silos in the Montreal of his youth, yet he offers a balanced approach in tracing societal changes as he led these organizations. We sense the dedication and gravitas with which Dr. Goldbloom approached these responsibilities, but also the liveliness that really makes Canada come alive in his accounts. Overall, we see evidence of steady, honest, respectful but firm guidance, and the way in which Dr. Goldbloom transferred his professional capacities (the physician's power of careful observation and prescription) and personal qualities (the moral compass and sense of humanity) into addressing the challenges of religious and linguistic relations.

These challenges are still with us. And they will require new bridge-builders, hopefully inspired by the words and deeds of Victor Goldbloom, to tackle them. **P**

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Being in the Game for the Right Reasons

David Axelrod

Believer: My Forty Years in Politics.
New York: Penguin Press, 2015.

Review by Lisa Van Dusen

Until 2012, when he shaved it off for charity, David Axelrod was known to the general public as “The David with the moustache” from the supporting cast of Barack Obama’s epic presidential narrative; the rumpled mensch message guru Oscar to David Plouffe’s clean-shaven, intense, organizational-wizard Felix.

In *Believer: My Forty Years in Politics*, Axelrod relives a passion that began when he was five—perched on a mailbox on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, listening to John F. Kennedy stump for the 1960 election—and peaked with his role in the historic 2008 campaign that made Obama, against formidable odds, the

first black president of the United States.

There are campaigns and then there are campaigns. The 2008 US presidential campaign was exceptional because of Obama’s race and the myriad ways in which it defined the story—from the time-has-come appeal of his biography to the crucial way in which his opponents underestimated him as a force to be reckoned with until he won the Iowa caucuses to the Rev. Jeremiah Wright eruption and the landmark Philadelphia speech that cut through the code and addressed the issue head-on.

It was also a great story because of how, as became increasingly obvious as Obama prevailed over the Clinton machine, race became less and less of an issue. As Axelrod’s book reveals and as Obama proved in the 2008 general election against John McCain and in 2012 against Mitt Romney, Obama was the better candidate.

“The campaign Obama, Plouffe and Axelrod ran was a multi-million dollar, breathtakingly viral, ultimately effective experiment in long-game, high-road, strategic vs. tactical politics.”

But for those of us who covered it—I went from volunteering for the Obama campaign in Columbia during the South Carolina primary to covering the campaign and the first 18 months of the administration in Washington for Sun Media—the 2008 campaign was exceptional for another reason, which is central to Axelrod’s book.

The campaign Obama, Plouffe and Axelrod ran was a multi-million dollar, breathtakingly viral, ultimately effective experiment in long-game, high-road, strategic vs. tactical politics.

If I hadn’t seen it for myself in decision after decision on the ground in South Carolina, where deputy national campaign director Steve Hildebrand presided, I probably would have rolled my eyes at this passage in “Believer”:

“Let’s never forget that it’s not just about winning, it’s about why,” I would tell my team. “That’s our edge. We lose that we can’t win.”

While acknowledging that there have been times, including in the toughest days in 2008, when he deviated from that ideal, Axelrod is that rarest of political animals who doesn’t operate on the

default mode of jungle protocol.

There have been other political organizations that have tried to replicate the messaging and mood of the 2008 Obama campaign without adhering to the principles; selling change and social media mastery while making judgment call after judgment call that betray classic political cynicism. The long game isn’t easy in the age of Twitter.

“Believer” isn’t hagiography; it’s the tale of a fateful partnership between a gifted political romantic and the once-in-a-lifetime candidate who combined all the intellectual, personal and retail qualities for a national run, plus a gut reflex to do the right thing.

In an exchange that pollsters, politicians and operatives will laugh out loud at, Axelrod walks in on the eve of the 2008 Indiana primary with new numbers showing them 12 points down, to which Obama responds, “Get the fuck out of here,” adding, “You’re a big downer.” In another exchange, Obama calls Axelrod a motherfucker during the dispiriting debate prep ahead of the first, rattling 2012 showdown with Mitt Romney.

So, he’s not invariably Spock-ish, and he’s not always a handler’s dream: His aversion to the performance art of debates is dwarfed only by his allergy to sound bites. But on issue after issue, in crisis after crisis, as Axelrod recounts, Obama chooses principle over political expediency, which, in our current political universe, can seem downright eccentric. It will quite likely be the presidential attribute people miss most about him when he leaves the White House.

In his epilogue, Axelrod laments the fact that Washington now seems a more polarized place than it was when Obama was elected on a mandate to change it. It’s an admission that reminds me of standing on the National Mall on inauguration day, 2009, amid a swarm of two million faces and realizing that, aside from being witnesses to history, they represented an infarction-inducing challenge to the status quo.

Still; saving the economy, reviving the auto industry, enacting health reform, repealing “Don’t ask Don’t Tell”, normalizing relations with Cuba and negotiating a tentative nuclear deal with Iran are no small achievements. Governing is always less fun than campaigning, and governing in a backlash is much more complicated. **P**

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