

## Tod Maffin: Maverick for Mental Health Promotion

*Ed Note: Tod was the keynote speaker at our BCSCA Conference this year, Counselling in a Wired World. He is an authority on how society and technology interact. Executive Member, Aliesha Stewart, reflects on the man who is a maverick for mental health promotion and invites us to do the same.*

As I sit down at the executive table, I notice Tod Maffin right away. His energy and humour are infectious and he is incredibly down to earth. The other thing that begins to come across- and really shows during his keynote speech at the BC School Counsellors Association conference is how much he is a maverick, a wild card. Tod Maffin is a man who knows what he wants, and won't be swayed in a different direction.

Halfway through Grade 9, Tod became frustrated with the school system. He disengaged, and his school counselor thought he was suicidal. This was not the case, but it didn't stop the counsellor from showing him a terrible anti-suicide film- which was incredibly awkward and not helpful at all. What Tod really needed was to be understood. His learning needs were unique and so was his goal to become a radio station host. As a young teenager he had already amassed all of the equipment needed to broadcast his own radio station. Not many students had his drive, ambition, or confidence. So when he realized that school couldn't give him what he needed he moved on. He didn't want to be molded into the 'standard' graduating student. He wanted to be free to do his own thing, and in his own way.

Tod succeeded. He was at the forefront of the .com boom and also came up with the idea for a program called MindfulEye, which analyzed public opinion of stock market confidence. Within a week of creating this company with three others he was being courted by some of the largest industry giants. The money began to flow and so too did the build-up of stress.

When speaking about his self-proclaimed "breakdown," Tod notes that we live in a society that breeds continuous action and multitasking and that the very action of being busy is rewarded. Taking time for oneself is generally not rewarded. As school counsellors, we are often asked to have lunch meetings, and there never seems to be enough time to write student notes. By the time Tod developed acute Pleurisy, which is a viral infection caused by stress, he knew he needed to make a change. When he told this to the venture capitalists he was working with, he was told that he had better "focus on the company" or else. Being the wiggly line he is, Tod chose the 'what else,' and walked away.

In the time that followed, Tod battled with alcoholism and depression. He learned that this ran in the family but couldn't stop himself until he ended up in rehabilitation. The most important lesson he learned there was to learn to ask for help. He had spent his whole life thus far knowing what he wanted and knowing how to get it for himself as other people just didn't understand his maverick ways. To learn to ask for help was very humbling for him and his wish is that we, as a society, create an environment where asking for help is rewarded.

With infectious passion Tod told the audience how important our jobs are and how important it is for us to continue to get funding for what we do. He asked "where is the revolution for mental health in our schools?" As counsellors we know we are still waiting for it. We know that there are 'wiggly

lines' out there who are just like Tod, and often we are their only advocates. The unique qualities that often make certain students so memorable, often put them at-risk for developing mental illness. With the right amount of support from counsellors though, these wild-card students can go on to contribute hugely to the betterment of society. Tod's final message to us counsellors is that we need more "rough stones," we need more mavericks: "crazy gets things done."