You have held significant leadership positions in non-profit, public, and private organizations over the years in a wide variety of fields, including telecommunications and the arts. What drew you to the cause of arthritis?

It came down to two things. First, the not-for-profit sector has always been my first and fondest love. The opportunity to take on a leadership position like this, after so many years in the corporate world, was just too good to resist. The second reason, and the real difference-maker for me personally, was that I saw the chance to work for an organization whose cause I believe in strongly. Like so many Canadians, I have family members who have suffered with chronic pain. I have seen how taxing it can be and the way it wears people and their loved ones down. The vision that powers The Arthritis Society (TAS)—helping millions to live well with arthritis—really touched a chord. It excited me because it is such a positive way of approaching the condition. I think we have got a chance to make a huge breakthrough in the way the public and policymakers view this challenge and, as a consequence, to create dramatic change for the better. There is a great foundation that has been laid here; it is an issue that matters tremendously. The chance to join the cause and to help shape that success was not something they had to offer me twice. I jumped at it.

Has any particular lesson you learned from a previous leadership experience especially prepared you for working with TAS?

Yes, and the lesson is very simple: it all comes down to leadership. Lots of organizations, whether they are in the private, public, or third sector, enjoy a clear mission. They know who they are and what they are all about, but not all of them have exceptional leadership. What I have learned by watching others is that great leaders bring two qualities, vision and inspiration: the ability to articulate a vision and inspire others to get there. That is how really great leaders motivate their teams to set and surpass goals. What you find consistently in such examples is that good leaders gather teams and unleash that sense of not just what to do, but how to do it. That is what I really hope to bring to the job, the ability to engage the team of staff and volunteers across the country, excite them around ambitious collective priorities for growth, and create a clear path to meeting these goals. I know it can be done because I have seen it done. I have been fortunate to be part of doing it. I am determined to help ensure we do it here at TAS.

You are trained as a lawyer. How does your legal background influence your approach to leading an organization and managing issues that arise in organizations you lead?

I am actually both a lawyer and an economist by profession, which my friends joke must mean that I am both annoying and boring! I think what the training has taught me—and it taught me this early on—is that communication is vital to success. Almost immediately after leaving school I was immersed in regulatory affairs and I would watch lawyers argue technical points of policy before the Canadian
Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTPC), often employing complex economic models and arguments. What did I take away? It helps a lot to be able to communicate well. Few people who could not express themselves well walked away with positive outcomes for their companies. That is a lesson I absorbed in my earliest days and it is one I intend to put to work here at TAS. Articulating our mission, optimizing buy-in with our staff and volunteers across the country as well as the broader arthritis community, attracting even more stakeholder and sponsor support—all these goals require a concentration on communications. So that is something I am going to take from my past and put to work as President of TAS.

**Are there any untapped resources you plan to help TAS leverage?**

I am only beginning to learn the full extent of the expertise, knowledge, and energy we have available to us as an organization. Working in collaboration and partnership with others, I think we have tremendous untapped potential. For example, I think we do great work across the country providing programs and services to people living with arthritis, but taking that expertise and marrying it with commercial and consumer know-how—which we have access to through so many of our partners—could open up all kinds of new opportunities. We could become the signature authority on techniques, tools, devices, and services to help people live well with arthritis. From that kind of elevated brand definition and awareness a vast number of new prospects emerge. So yes, the answer is that I think we have plenty of untapped and under-tapped resources. Unlocking their value is one of my top priorities.

**What goals do you hope to help TAS achieve?**

The goals and mission of TAS are well set already. We exist to provide leadership and funding in research, advocacy, and solutions to improve the quality of life for Canadians living with arthritis. The “what” we do is already clear. That means my goals must focus on the “how”: how we get the job done, even better and in ways that benefit even more people. I am still very new on the job but I already have a few ideas. Certainly, I think we can and must strengthen our fundraising in order to expand the resources available to deliver on our mission. I think our fundamental priority is to identify and prioritize some key initiatives, nationally and locally, that will really connect with people and make a difference. The bottom line is that I am going to really concentrate on gathering the team around a few, sharply defined goals that focus on better realizing our mission. I am very enthusiastic that we have all the ingredients for success.

**Can you tell us about any exciting new initiatives underway or about to launch at TAS?**

Stemming from our extensive research strategy, implemented last year, TAS recently conducted a comprehensive needs assessment. The results of this study are already driving the direction of our future programs and services and I am committed to maintaining that momentum. Let me give you just a single concrete example: to better support the millions of Canadians living with arthritis, TAS recently launched a revitalized resource-based website at www.arthritis.ca. Launched earlier this year, the new branding platform is “We have arthritis. It doesn’t have us.” This platform launched earlier this year to build awareness and heighten TAS profile; that is a big priority for me.

Telecommunications firms, such as TELUS, where you previously worked, seem to have an increasing interest in becoming involved in the field of health care, particularly in e-health applications. What benefits do you think they can bring to Canadian healthcare that will benefit consumers and providers?

There are a host of benefits that stem from the utilization and integration of new technologies. These include: quicker and more exact diagnostic tools; faster transfer of test results; and better and more widely available inventories of medical and medicinal histories. All of these benefits and many more will directly impact the quality of life for those with chronic conditions, including arthritis and pain. I would also insinuate TAS into that conversation. Our retooled website, for example, is one of the finest aggregators of information and insight about arthritis that you will find anywhere. In addition to all the knowledge it collects on its own, it also provides easy access to a nearly limitless but reliable set of external resources. I truly believe these new tools are one of the reasons that we are on the brink of such exciting change in the near future. Once again, it reminds me that I am privileged to be here in this position at this time.

*Janet Yale, President and CEO, The Arthritis Society*