



Why Anyone Can Run: Equal Voice looks at Findings from Samara's Report "The Accidental Citizen"

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The screenshot shows the Samara website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'About Us', 'Projects', 'Blog', 'Get Involved', and 'Contact Us'. Below this, the date 'JUNE 21, 2010' is displayed. The main content area features the article title 'In the news: The Accidental Citizen?' by Alison Loat. The article text begins with 'Last week we released the introductory report of Canada's first-ever series of exit interviews with former Members of Parliament...' and continues to discuss the report's findings. A sidebar on the right, titled 'Popular Topics', lists various subjects including 'political leadership', 'media and citizens', and 'The Accidental Citizen?'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there is a 'Newsletter' sign-up box.

Samara's new Report "The Accidental Citizen" supports the notion that anyone can run.

Samara, a Canadian based charitable organization that studies citizen engagement within Canadian democracy, recently released a report entitled: ***The Accidental***

Citizen. Authored by Samara co-founders, Michael MacMillan and Alison Loat, the report analyzes exit interviews that were conducted with 65 Members of Parliament (MPs) who served in Canada's 38th and 39th Parliaments (2004-2008). It presents fascinating findings regarding how MPs chose a life in politics and their reflections surrounding their decisions to run.

Contrary to popular belief, Samara found that the path to politics was far from calculated – it was, more often than not, accidental. The majority of MPs interviewed weren't lawyers or millionaires; nor had they spent years in the political arena greasing their political machines before making the decision to run. On average, the MPs were "normal", often middle-class, recognized community leaders with educational and professional backgrounds that varied considerably. Some were recruited to run with a political "ask" from party representatives, whereas others were encouraged to run by family members and close friends. They were priests, nurses, small business managers, and Grand Chiefs, to name a few.

What's more, despite the flurry of differences as to how they got to the gate, what MPs found challenging was the chaotic and often blurry nomination process, or what the authors refer to as "The Black Box." In Canada, the nomination process is decided by each party and is often unwieldy and unruly. Candidates often cited this time as the worst part of running for elected office. However, Samara noted several benefits to the chaotic nomination process, which include: providing candidates with a platform to debate issues, exploring the finer



details of community issues and policy, and providing “good practice for the general election.”

So, what does this mean in the context of Equal Voice and electing more women in Canada? Anyone can run for office.

Equal Voice’s research suggests that women often refrain from seeking political office because they either don’t feel qualified or don’t have enough political experience to do so. What’s more, they don’t seek elected office because they may never have been “asked” to run.

Overall, Samara’s report reveals that running for office is less of a science than one may have expected. There may be difficult elements to running (like the nomination process), but it’s not necessary to be a rocket scientist to make the first leap. If you are a woman interested in running and you don’t know the party leaders from the outset, congratulations: neither did many of the MPs in this study. If you’re concerned you don’t have “enough” political experience, Samara’s findings show that most candidates were not “political” when they decided to run. If you don’t have a role-model, become someone else’s. Finally, if no one has ever asked you to run, but you really want to: consider yourself asked.