

## Ruben Nelson

By training and inclination, **Ruben Nelson** is a visionary big picture strategic thinker.

A Canadian pioneer of serious futures thinking, Ruben has spent his life exploring and seeking to understand the forces that are now re-shaping our lives, our world and our future. His unique mental models and strategic insights transform and make sense of the confusion, anger and turmoil of our perilous times. He has come to understand the personal-to-civilizational transformation we are in. Today, he is Canada's leading researcher, practitioner and teacher of strategic foresight 2.0 – the next generation of strategic foresight and the new cognitive work of whole systems governance and leadership.

What is more, he has the courage, capacity and character to engage those with whom he works in difficult conversations. All his adult life, leaders of organizations have turned to Ruben as a source of strength and stability in times of crisis. Accordingly, he has conceived and led new organizations and revived dying ones. In sum, Ruben is a reliable guide to our most deeply desirable futures.

At its heart, Ruben's message is hopeful and transformational. He challenges those with whom he works not only to raise their game, but to learn to see, embrace and cooperate with the long transformation we are in – the transition of our Modern Techno-industrial cultures into new and more promising co-creative ways of living. His vision of an emerging Co-creative civilization offers a basis for the hope that lies the other side of despair.

For over forty years, Ruben has offered futures-oriented strategic advice to Cabinet Ministers, Board Members and senior executives in every sector of Canadian society. He is equally at home in C Suites, Board Rooms, conference rooms and church basements. For example, he has advised a Canadian Prime Minister on the future of social policy. He is one of only a handful of Canadians to have undertaken integral research into our long evolution and transformation from a late Modern Techno-industrial society and economy into a Co-creative form of civilization.

Ruben was born and raised in Calgary. He was trained in philosophy, political theory, theology and the history of religion as an undergraduate and graduate student at Queen's University, Queen's Theological College, the University of Calgary and United Theological College (Bangalore). He has taught at Queen's University and the University of Calgary. He has lived in India and worked in Ottawa.

In 1960, as an undergraduate at Queen's, Ruben organized Canada's first formal conference on the future. In 1968, he became the first Director of MacEwan Hall – then the University Centre at UofC. There he conceived and operationalized a unique form of shared governance.

In 1970-'71, Ruben was on a two-person team with a mandate to re-conceive social policy for Canada. He was also a member of the small group that articulated Canada's first Multiculturalism policy in 1971-'72. He then guided the development of the federal New Horizons programme. In the mid-1970s, Ruben worked at Environment Canada's Advanced Concepts Centre, where early work on climate change, appropriate technology, futures-oriented conversations with Canadians and what later came to be called *sustainable*

## Ruben Nelson

*development* was undertaken. While there, in his Cultural Paradigms Project, he was the first person to apply the concept of evolving paradigms to whole cultures and forms of civilization.

In the early 1980s, he was the Ottawa-based consultant for the National Capital Commission's successful effort to resurrect the Rideau Area Project – a multi-government project with 47 stakeholder groups. Ruben designed the unique organizational and citizen engagement structure for the project.

In the late 1980s, Ruben designed and directed a three year multi-client investigation into the hypothesis that we face a future that lies beyond, not within, the paradigm of our Modern Techno-industrial form of civilization. The Post-Industrial Futures Project was then, and may still be, the most thorough investigation into this issue.

In the early 1990s, Ruben conceived and chaired the Calgary Information Port Project. He then served as its first Director. Its work and findings contributed substantially to Alberta's several hundred million dollar ICT investments in the late 1990s. He also served as the resident futurist for both the Alberta and the Saskatchewan Commissions on the Future of Health Care.

More recently, he and his [Foresight Canada](#) colleagues designed a two-year process that would enable thousands of Albertans to engage in the formulation of a strategy for the landscapes of southern Alberta. He also directed the Foresight Canada team that undertook a fresh assessment for The National Research Council of Canada of the complex and swampy strategic issues Canada and the world would face to 2020. Ruben provided advice and counsel to the Deputy Minister who headed the secretariat for the Premier's Council on Economic Strategy. He was an active participant and advisor to the Alberta Framework for Social Policy Project. In 2005 Ruben worked with Felicity Edwards to design and facilitate a 10 month citizen engagement project in Canmore, Alberta – Mining the Future.

Ruben was a Canadian member of the International Futures Academy based in Vienna and one of six International Advisors to a major social futures project sponsored by the Federal Government of Germany. He also completed an assignment for the Fraunhofer Institute, Germany, as a member of a six person international advisory team for their strategic foresight project which will inform the German Government's investments in technology R&D.

Ruben's current preoccupation is the creation, in cooperation with professional colleagues, of a new support system dedicated to understanding and promoting the personal-to-civilizational transformation that good governance in the Anthropocene requires.

For many years, Ruben has lived as a freelance intellectual contributing to such diverse areas as civilizational change and transformation, social policy, technology assessment, futures research, strategic foresight, the emerging knowledge-based economy/society and citizen engagement. Ruben has contributed to these fields as an author, speaker, workshop facilitator, project director, institutional designer and leader. He has written on a wide range of topics, including paradigm change, strategic foresight as the new cognitive work of leadership, the societal implications of ICT, the emerging information society, 21<sup>st</sup> Century social policy, and the future of democracy. Some of his writing can be found [here](#), including his best-selling [The Illusions of Urban Man](#). Today he is recognized by his peers around the world as Canada's most widely-experienced professional futures researcher.

A sought-after keynote speaker, Ruben has made over 750 keynote addresses in and beyond Canada.

Ruben is the only Canadian who is a Fellow of the [World Business Academy](#), the [World Academy of Art and Science](#) and the Meridian Institute for Leadership, Governance, Change and the Future. He is a professional member of the [World Futures Studies Federation](#) and an emeritus member of the [Association of Professional Futurists](#). He is also an active member in [Ralph Connor Memorial United Church](#) in Canmore.

Ruben has served as President of the [SCM of Canada](#) and of the Canadian Association for Futures Studies, as Vice-Chair of the [Institute on Religion in an Age of Science](#), as a Director and President of the [Association for Humanistic Psychology](#), and as a Director of Expo 2005 – Calgary's Bid Team for Expo 2005, Prosperity South, the Calgary Economic Development Authority, the [World Future Studies Federation](#), and the [Enviros Wilderness School](#).

Ruben has been honoured by Queen's University, the Calgary Alumni of Queen's University and the Chinook Region of Scouts Canada. He is the 2018 recipient of the Don Michael Award. He is also a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International.

Today, Ruben is Executive Director of [Foresight Canada](#).

He lives in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta with Heather, his wife of 58 years, and their three cats. They have two adult children.

Contact:

1-888-673-3537 in North America

+1-403-673-3537 elsewhere

[rubennelson@shaw.ca](mailto:rubennelson@shaw.ca)