

2012

David Suzuki

Recipient, 2012 Inamori Ethics Prize

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/ijel>

 Part of the [Applied Ethics Commons](#), [Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

2012 Inamori Ethics Prize, Recipient, (2012) "David Suzuki," *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership*: Vol. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/ijel/vol1/iss1/11>

This Biography is brought to you for free and open access by the Cross Disciplinary Publications at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The International Journal of Ethical Leadership by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

David Suzuki

Recipient of the 2012 Inamori Ethics Prize

Dr. David Takayoshi Suzuki was born March 24, 1936 in Vancouver, Canada, where his parents owned a dry-cleaning business. A third generation Japanese-Canadian, his grandparents immigrated to Canada from Hiroshima and Aichi Prefecture, Japan. Suzuki grew up with a twin sister, Marcia, and two other siblings, Aiko and Dawn. He attributes his love of nature to his father, who often took the family on trips.

An unfortunate event occurred early in Dr. Suzuki's life. During World War II, because of their Japanese heritage, his family was interned in British Columbia. In 1942, his father was sent to a labor camp in Solsqua while Suzuki and the rest of the family were sent to Slocan. The government also confiscated and sold the family business. After the war ended, the Suzuki family was reunited but like many other Japanese-American families, they were forced to resettle east of the Rocky Mountains. They lived in several different locations and eventually made their way to London, Ontario, where Dr. Suzuki's paternal uncles owned a construction company. These experiences did much to shape Dr. Suzuki into a champion of human rights, as well as a devoted environmentalist.

In 1958, Suzuki received his BA in biology from Amherst College, Massachusetts, and in 1961, earned a PhD in zoology from the University of Chicago. He started his research career studying genetics, researching genetic mutations in fruit flies. Suzuki quickly won recognition for his work and became a respected geneticist. He was a postdoctoral research associate in the biology division of Tennessee's Oak Ridge National Laboratory and an assistant professor of genetics at the University of Alberta. There, he became involved with the NAACP and spoke out against the Vietnam War. Since 1963, he has been a professor in the genetics department of the University of British Columbia, a position he retired from in 2001. From 1982 to 1987, he also served as a director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

Suzuki's impact through media could arguably be one of his greatest contributions to environmentalism. He started by hosting the children's television show *Suzuki on Science*, which ran from 1971 to 1972. From 1975 to 1979, he hosted the radio show *Quirks & Quarks*, which ran on CBC AM radio, as well as the television program *Science Magazine*. In 1985, his television show

A Planet for the Taking won the United Nations Environment Program Medal. Suzuki also hosted *The Secret of Life* in 1993, produced *Yellowstone to Yukon: The Wildlands Project* in 1997 for the Discovery Channel, and put together the four-hour miniseries *The Sacred Balance* in 2001.

The television program *The Nature of Things* is among Suzuki's most well-known work. Debuting on CBC on November 6, 1960, *The Nature of Things* covers a variety of topics related to the environment and science. In 1979, Suzuki signed on to host the program and continues in that role. Through *The Nature of Things*, Suzuki educates Canadians on various ecological issues, advocating for more sustainable ways of living, and highlighting the threats confronting the environment. *The Nature of Things* has detailed current events from logging and mining to marijuana effects on mental illness. The show is broadcast in over eighty countries and continuously receives awards and nominations for prizes. Suzuki has won three Gemini Awards and an ACTRA Award for Best Host for his work with the program.

Suzuki has also carried out his ardent environmental and human rights activism in other parts of his life. Besides his involvement with the NAACP, he has worked on issues with First Nations through *The Nature of Things* and later through the David Suzuki Foundation. In 1992, Suzuki and his daughter Severn spoke at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Climate change and environmental degradation are two of the biggest issues that he speaks on, and much of Suzuki's personal efforts have been centered on these topics.

A prolific writer, Suzuki has published fifty-two books, fifteen of which are for children. These include *David Suzuki: The Autobiography*, *Genetics: The Ethics of Engineering Life*, *Wisdom of the Elders: Sacred Native Stories of Nature*, and *The Sacred Balance*, all of which reveal his thoughts and guidance on environmentalism, sustainability, and nature. Several other works have a different focus. *Other Japan: Voices Beyond the Mainstream* and *The Japan We Never Knew: A Voyage of Discovery* are the results of Suzuki's visits to Japan to explore his heritage.

In 1990, Suzuki co-founded the David Suzuki Foundation with his wife Tara Cullis. A retreat of Canada's top environmental thinkers inspired the formation of the foundation. The foundation's goal "is to protect the diversity of nature and our quality of life, now and for the future" and that "within a generation, Canadians act on the understanding that we are all interconnected and interdependent with nature." The organization does much to promote activism and social change among pro-environment efforts in Canada and abroad. The foundation has several main objectives: protecting the climate

and environment, changing the economy within the earth's finite resources, and rebuilding community, as well as forging connections with nature. Also, with the consultation of the Union of Concerned Scientists, David Suzuki's Nature Challenge was created to inspire people to make adjustments in their daily lives to improve quality of life while being environmentally friendly. The nonprofit has been recognized with awards countless times, including the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Environment Awards. In April 2012, Suzuki stepped down from the foundation's board of directors, but is still very much outspoken over climate change and environmentalism.

Often called the "Carl Sagan of the Environmentalist Movement," Suzuki has received numerous awards for his efforts in the cause of environmentalism and human rights. A few of these include the Order of Canada in 1976, the Order of British Columbia in 1995, and UNESCO's Kalinga Prize in 1986. In 2007, Global Exchange presented Suzuki with the International Human Rights Award. He has even been formally adopted by two First Nation tribes. In 2009, he received The Right Livelihood Award which is given to those "working on practical and exemplary solutions to the most urgent challenges facing the world today."

Though he recognizes the incredible challenges humanity faces, Suzuki believes the solutions can be found in people, should they find the will to look for them. He has stated "The human brain now holds the key to our future. We have to recall the image of the planet from outer space: a single entity in which air, water, and continents are interconnected. That is our home."