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The ?F? Word.

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Today I want to talk about the ?F? word. Is the ?F? word a force for good or a force for evil? Is it fabulous or flippant? Fantastic or foul? Recent experiences, particularly during the Caledon election, have proven the ?F? word to be all of these things - sometimes with too much emphasis on the ?foul.? That said ? there are plenty of times when it has also been phenomenal (not an ?f? word but it sounds like one!) What am I referring to? Facebook.

I should be clear that I recognize everyone has a different experience with Facebook and that some of you have no experience with it whatsoever, whether for philosophical reasons or because you quite simply don't have the time or interest. If that's the case, as someone addicted to the rush of information and who wastes inordinate amounts of time on this social media vehicle, I say; Good for you, keep it that way. Because the reality is, Facebook is a timewaster. We have only to look as far back as the original reason for its creation to know that Facebook is something that should never have evolved as it has. Conceived by men, as a misogynist ratings tool for women on the campus of Harvard University, the fact that instead it gained traction as a means of staying in contact with family and friends is an anomaly in itself. That it now serves as the main source for some, of either factual or fictitious news, is worrisome.

During the election (full disclosure, I ran as a candidate for a school trustee position) I saw first hand the power facebook could yield. The dissemination of information was fast and furious. More concerning however, was how often that information veered from factual to fanciful to outright fakery. A discerning reader would no doubt have been able to perceive the differences but what of those who were merely scanning the headlines, quick to weigh in on a topic without the benefit of a more fulsome understanding? What of the armchair so called keyboard warriors who spread false information as gospel truth at an alarming rate? Who holds whom accountable when the truth is out there but hard to find amongst the plethora of falsehoods? Most important of all ? how do you correct the spread of misinformation when it seems, like a virus, to spread so much faster than the truth?

In another recent example of Facebook gone bad, local high school students stayed home enmass due to rumours of the potential for violence. Parents equally (again, full disclosure ? me included) fanned the flames with an ongoing discussion about what was truth and what was fiction. Various media postings did nothing to alleviate parent anxiety and an eventual robocall made by at least one of the high schools was too little too late to stem the tide of Monday morning absenteeism. Would any of this have happened had Facebook not existed? Perhaps ? but it's likely not nearly as many students would have been impacted.

Personally, I have a love and hate relationship with Facebook and 100% admit that more often than not I refer to it as the ?F? word (as in, negatively, in the same context you might use the real ?F? word.) That said however, there are still occasions when the Facebook community overwhelms. It can be a force for good just as much as the alternative. It connects long lost friends. Mommy groups on Facebook help alleviate the social isolation felt by some new Moms as they begin to navigate the world of parenthood and Facebook acts as a source of inspiration and information as often as it spreads fear and doubt. Recently, on sharing a specific request for support that I knew my beloved Caledon friends were well - equipped to be able to assist, I was absolutely overwhelmed with the kind and generous response of our community. Because of this one post, a young girl will hopefully experience a dream come true in the near future and for that I am so incredibly grateful.

So is the ?F? word fabulous or foul? A force for good or evil? I suppose in the end, like so much about the world around us, Facebook is both. It's a powerful tool for sharing the good news, obtaining help when it's most needed and making it easy for friends and family to stay in touch. But like everything else, with the good there's bad, and the potential for misuse, for misunderstanding and for misdirection. Caledon ? I have seen your Facebook side. I wouldn't grade you with an ?F? but neither an A+.

(PS ? If you see me on any of your pages or groups ? please don't ban me!!)