

Our governments are here to serve, not conspire

by Mark Pavilons

We need to work on our trust issues, people!

The Dalai Lama points out that a lack of transparency results in ?distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.?

We hear, time and again, of governments at all levels being more open, more ?transparent.?

?If the people cannot trust their government to do the job for which it exists ? to protect them and to promote their common welfare ? all else is lost,? said former U.S. president Barack Obama.

I got a bit of an eye-opener recently during an outdoor press conference at Cold?Creek Conservation area, where Environment Minister Rod Phillips unveiled the new provincial environmental plan.

Media, and there were plenty, had an hour to review the documents and then formulate their questions. ?From the outset, the questions were pointed, almost combative. None noted any positive aspects of the new plan, but rather ways it can go wrong, and things the government is doing wrong. It's almost as if Toronto media have an instinctual distrust of government and ?happy endings? just don't exist.

Funny that the journalists on hand are so intelligent and well versed in environmental science that they can tell the minister and his staff that they've missed the mark.

Critics are fun to watch. To them, solving climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving taxpayers money is easy. ?It's a no-brainer and they can all do it better. Really?

I?swear, members of the opposition parties must be given handbooks filled with colourful quotes to be used for every occasion.

For every policy, document, strategy and law, our government spends millions of dollars and thousands of human hours from staff and experts to create a plan. One would think the end result is something decent, feasible and workable. Phillips said the new environmental plan is ?sensible? and ?achievable.? It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to meet the needs and achieve certain goals. It doesn't have to please everyone.

I?doubt well intentioned people run for politics as a way to hurt their constituents. ?No, they enter politics with gusto, a drive to do good work and a passion to serve.

Caledon has been lucky to have solid reputation over the years in its MPPs and MPs.

I often get this vision in my head of lobbyists and anti-establishment nay-sayers rubbing their hands together, trying to come up with ways to discredit those in power. Maybe it's always been that way.

Our system has created a whole segment of critics, presumably to keep the government in check. ?But even ?watchdogs??can get ornery. For some, their only purpose is to criticize, impugn, distract, humiliate and attack. Let's face it, everyone ? party critics, the media, special interest groups ? has their own vested interest and inherent bias.

No wonder distrust, confusion and even fear run rampant in our society.

Yes, journalists are supposed to ask questions and get to the truth. ?They're supposed to dig deep. But are they supposed to ?rake

muck?? In a 1906 speech, President Teddy Roosevelt railed against journalists he thought focused too much on exposing corruption in business and government. Roosevelt called them "the men with the muck-rakes" and implied that they needed to learn "when to stop raking the muck, and to look upward."

It seems things haven't changed.

As a journalist with a community newspaper, I believe my job is to point out the really neat things happening locally. Everyone has their own unique story.

Regarding "hard news" and the litany of government announcements, my job is to help clear the underbrush and try to make sense of it all. Most people don't have the time or the desire to read through mountains of documents and staff reports, so like a chef, I cut away the fat and serve up something palatable.

I am currently editor of the King Weekly Sentinel. I am sometimes criticized for not digging up the dirt. I'm far too soft on local politicians and the goings-on in King's inner circles, some have told me. To be honest, in the five-plus years I've been at the helm of the Sentinel, I haven't found any real "dirt" at all.

Gone are the days of parking lot deals, handshakes and exchanges of envelopes filled with cash. Every council decision is duly documented, and every staff report posted for all to see. Every penny in the Township coffers is accounted for.

Mark Twain said we should be loyal to our country all the time, and loyal to government when it deserves it. Fair enough.

Here, I have found the councillors and staff to be extremely approachable. It's not so in other municipalities.

Sure, no one and no system is perfect and there are always ways to make things more efficient, more productive and more transparent.

I have met literally thousands of people in my career, from all walks of life. The bottom line, whether you're a journalist at Queen's Park, or a senior government leader, we're all the same and suffer from the same human frailties. For the most part, we all want to contribute.

That's what makes it all so much fun!