

Bill Rea ? It's simple ? Don't be a jerk

There are certain things in life that are unfair, but we all have to put up with regardless, if for no other reason than we have no choice.

These things vary from person to person, depending on their standing in life. For example, certain occupations provide certain privileges, but also obligations and additional burdens to bear. Those of you who have ever waited tables, for example, know about verbal abuse from customers who don't like the way the guy in the kitchen cooked their steak, as if the server had anything to do with it.

Despite that, there are the odd times when people on the negative end of such treatment will dig in their proverbial heels and strike back. And I think a lot of us are ready to applaud such actions.

I've been doing a lot of that over the last couple of days, as I've read and heard about CityNews reporter Shauna Hunt and the way she put a couple of louts in their place after they shouted obscenities into her microphone while she was trying to interview some people outside a Toronto FC game last Sunday.

Her play certainly worked, as one of the characters apparently lost a very high-paying job with Hydro One as a result. I don't know if Hunt envisioned that he would endure such consequences, but she did make her point. If you haven't seen the tape of this, you might want to give it a look-see. I've been able to access it from a couple of web sources, and in all cases, the obscene words have been bleeped out. But my childhood included enough hours in school yards that I was able to gather what words were being used.

I have heard some people wondering if the guy really deserved to lose his job over this, although from what I've heard, those asking the question are in the minority. We have to remember he was part of a group of grown men who were acting like a bunch of adolescents. Had they been teens acting like that, and had their parents seen the tapes, I suspect they would have been grounded for the remainder of this decade.

One of the great disadvantages of being an adult is that occasionally you are actually expected to act like one.

My job requires me to be exposed to the public every day. When I'm in the field, I'm representing my company, meaning a certain standard of behaviour is expected of me. And since I'm something of a public figure, making a public pest of myself in a fashion that makes the news is not likely to go over well with my boss. So if I cross that line, I really have no one to blame but myself.

I think most of us would agree that it's okay to have a good time, and maybe act a little silly. But there are limits, and being obnoxious with a person who is just trying to do their job goes too far.

There have been times in my line of work when I have been in similar situations, although I have never had to endure the type of suggestive comments Hunt was treated to.

About 20 years ago, when I was working in Toronto, I was covering a street festival along Eglinton Avenue. One woman took it upon herself to remind me that I should ask people's authorization before taking their picture, then followed me around, telling people I was about to photograph that they had the right to refuse. She was annoying, but didn't prove to be much of a hindrance. In fact, some of the subjects seemed a little resentful over her butting in. I think this woman was dealing with other issues as well.

There have also been times I've been targeted by people who don't like me, or some of the things I've written

I was once interviewing a man after a public meeting when a woman of my acquaintance came up to the guy and cited something I had written in my latest column that he might have found offensive. She had the quote accurate, but its context was about 180 degrees off the mark (which she would have realized, had she read the whole sentence). I probably should have ignored her, but I was angry that she had interfered with me trying to do my job, and called after her that she should read the piece before commenting on it. The fact is she was an active member of a faction that the paper I was working for at the time had editorially opposed. In fairness, I bumped into this woman at a function a couple of days later. She approached me with the words "I owe you an apology." She went on to say she had only glanced at the column before she spoke, getting around to reading it later. I tried to be as gracious as I could, resisting the temptation to ask what business she had being so rude in the first place.

But it is true that people interfering with me doing my job earn my wrath, and it's sometimes hard to resist the temptation to fire back.

Politicians and elected officials often have to put up with abuse in public, but sometimes they strike back.

Going back more than 30 years, I remember a couple of occasions when the late Ronald Reagan responded to hecklers by simply telling them to shut up. His perennial popularity let him get away with such antics.

I was never much of a fan of Jean Chretien, especially while he was Prime Minister. But I well remember a time he was attending a function and a protester parked himself right in his path. Chretien, if memory serves, dealt with this fellow in the most basic fashion. He grabbed him by the neck and shoved him out of the way. I applauded at the time. I even wrote a piece praising him for it (one of

the very few positive things I ever wrote and Chretien), realizing there was one pain in the butt had been taught a lesson. You will recall a couple of years ago that Prince William started legal action against a publication that printed inappropriate pictures of himself and his wife. I don't think he did it for the money. He's very well connected with a rich grandmother and the prospects of a really good job one of these days. But he was sending out a message to other photographers and publications that he was ready to hit back if pushed far enough. I think he was also very mindful of the grief his late mother was put through by the media. Good for him. I hope the message was received by all concerned.

We all have rights to do certain things, and if we so choose, we have the right to be jerks. But we also have obligations, and they include being respectful to other people. And if the rights and obligations run into conflict, then there are consequences. I know of a couple of soccer fans who learned about that the hard way. Perhaps there are other people observing their antics who might take a lesson from that.

Alas, I also know there are a lot of people out there who are too dumb to get the message

