

Bill Rea ? The extension helped a lot

It is a fact that mistakes happen and we are all responsible for some, with certain degree of regularity.

Even I have been known to pull the occasional boner (hard to believe, I know, but true).

Mistakes often carry consequences. These can sometimes be serious, if not very serious. On the other hand, the consequences can work out rather well for many people.

Thus, I'm happy to encourage the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to keep those boo-boos coming.

As you know, everyone's income tax was to be in the mail by the close of business last Thursday. I confess I was a little late getting to it this year, but I did get the job done. By the opening of last week, all the forms had been obtained, all the numbers had been crunched, all the calculations had been made and I was happy to see a refund was due to come my way. All I needed was the necessary time to get everything in its proper form, looking semi-professional, and in the mail.

I am far too much of a dinosaur to get into filing my return over the internet. As well, in deference to my late parents, especially my mother who was a payroll clerk in a chartered accountant's office before her retirement (I once wrote she could lecture the finance minister on tax law, much to her indignation), I refuse to farm the job out to any of the ?pros.? I'll do it myself.

Alas, last week was a very busy one for me. I had to work every night (until 1 a.m. Tuesday), and setting myself down to messing about with numbers when getting home after 9, and trying to work in time to eat, was a major chore. And I really didn't want to fall asleep while working on something like my income tax. Figuring out when I was going to get the time to get the job done was becoming a major worry.

I was channeling out memories of my late father's voice berating me for leaving things to ?the last bloody minute.? There were times in my youth when my old man would have fired accusations like that at me, but have used other words in the place of ?bloody.? I won't elaborate. I try to avoid trashing the Third Commandment in print, if I can.

So I was quite a happy man last Tuesday when I learned that the deadline for filing tax returns had been pushed back. It seems some notices went out to some people from CRA with conflicting information regarding the deadline. So the agency did the sensible thing and gave everyone an extension. The feds are going to get their money anyway, so what difference does a couple of days make?

After hearing the news on the radio, the first thing I did was go on the CRA?website to confirm it.

Happy days!

?The CRA sincerely regrets and apologizes for any confusion this may have caused,? concluded the message on the website.

No apologies are necessary, CRA. I completely understand, and approve.

It's hard not to feel good when one is handed a reprieve.

No matter, the job is done for another year, and I got things done on time, at least according to the revised deadline.

Going through the income tax forms are a chore for most of us. They can be tedious, can they not?

I have always been rather good at working with figures, so the number crunching seldom causes me grief. In fact, I rather enjoy it. But I know there are some people who just have troubles when it comes to working with numbers. I can see how they might have problems with the task. It's the concepts involved in the forms that sometimes cause me to stumble. I dread having to consult the guide, because I find it confuses me, rather than help.

On the other hand, in my case at least, the end of the process usually involves a refund. That makes the task a little easier.

And I don't object to paying taxes. Government needs money to provide the services I expect of it, and I have never had a problem with paying my share. I might object to some of the things government does with my tax dollars, or some of the ways it raises the money. As I have often stated, Dalton McGuinty and his Liberals came to power in Ontario in 2003 with a promise not to raise taxes. While the prospect of no tax hikes was appealing, I voted for the Grits that year because I was mad at the guys who were in charge before the election. I was mad at McGuinty and company after their first budget because they raised taxes, in the form of the Health Care Premium.

So while I support the right of government to exact taxes from me, I also have the right to tell government what I think of its taxation policies (all policies, for that matter) at election time.

It is a well-established fact that income tax time is a stressful time of year. I well remember as a kid some of the heated arguments my folks got into around this time. My wife and I seldom fight over taxes (we seldom fight at all, for that matter), although there is considerable lobbying for use of things like the calculator, scissors, stapler and table space.

There is a certain amount of stress because you're dealing with a government that is empowered to press charges if things get too messed up. I remember the first time I sat down to do my income tax, with my mother trying to backseat drive the process, objecting to the way I made my rough calculations. I dug in my heels, and she got exasperated with me.

?Fine!? she barked as she walked away. ?Go to jail!?

I didn't.

Mom was a natural born backseat driver, which resulted in me having absolutely no tolerance for such antics in later life, as numerous bosses have learned the hard way.

It is true it is an offence to file a false return, and we are all expected to exercise due diligence. I think it's also true that most of us are diligent when preparing our tax returns. Sure, if there are certain deductions we're entitled to, the smart among us take advantage of them. The government expects that of us. They made the deductions available for a reason.

And there are some who might try to sneak something through. I don't, if for no other reason than I don't want to try and explain to a judge why I tried to pull a fast one.

But none of us are perfect, so mistakes are likely. Although I was careful when it came to filling out my forms, I don't guarantee there are no mistakes. Like the folks at CRA, I can pull the occasional goof. If the powers that be who review my return find any boners, then I grant them an extra five days to get my refund to me

