

Bill Rea ? Waiting can be a pain

There is an expression many, if not most, of us are familiar with, which roughly goes, "Hurry up and wait."

It's one of those sort of nonsensical terms that pops into our collective heads whenever we're sitting around doing nothing. Either whatever it is we're waiting for has been delayed, or we've been delayed getting there. It simply boils down to the reality that we all spend a certain amount of our time sitting around doing nothing. Most of you, like me, can find more productive things to do with time than wait.

I don't think I could be called a patient man. I think I like waiting a lot less than most people, although I'm enough of a realist to know that it sometimes has to be endured. Not enjoyed, mind you, but endured.

Hang around enough municipal council meetings, you will find yourself doing a certain amount of waiting. Sometimes, you sit around listening to meaningless procedural debates (I once saw a board full of school trustees spend some 90 minutes trying to approve their agenda. I think that one's pretty tough to beat). There are other times when you will have to put up with a politician or deputant who takes five minutes to make about 30 seconds worth of point.

Meetings are sometimes late starting, but the fact is that doesn't happen very often, and when it does, there's usually a pretty reasonable explanation.

It's the in-camera (or closed) sessions that can be annoying and sometimes long.

I've been in this business long enough to appreciate that in-camera sessions are essential, under certain circumstances, such as when there are legal matters being discussed. Few of us would want our consultations with our lawyers made public, and municipalities have the same right. The general public is also not allowed to know about personnel issues, negotiations and the like.

A former boss of mine retired from this business some years ago, and he got himself elected to council in the municipality in which he was living. I bumped into him some time later, observing that he now gets to know what goes on in-camera. He responded with an exasperated growl, "Those are the most boring parts of the whole meeting."

If the participants are bored, think what it's like for the poor common folk waiting in the halls.

That's what went on at the April 9 meeting of Peel Regional council.

I was there, so I know it was a crucial issue that was being discussed, namely the Bolton expansion study. It was Mayor Allan Thompson who asked that council go in-camera. That was all logical. The problem was they spent some 90 minutes behind closed doors. Business is business, but it also meant a lot of people spent those 90 minutes hanging around the hall outside the Regional Council Chambers.

I was lucky. I had my trusty laptop, so I could at least get some work done. Most of the people displaced from the Council Chambers had little else to do but chat. I guess since most of the impacted folks have had experience with this sort of thing, there was a certain amount of acceptance. Most of the conversations I overheard seemed rather light-hearted.

On the other hand, what else could these people have done?

It was one of those periods of prolonged waiting that come up from time to time. Like I indicated, they are annoying, but not too terribly frequent.

Alas, something similar occurred the following Tuesday at the Caledon council meeting, although members of the public like me weren't kicked out of the Chambers, and the session didn't last 90 minutes.

They do things different in Caledon. Instead of asking the public to get out of the Chambers, it's the councillors that excuse themselves to another meeting room. And this time, they were only out for a little more than an hour.

Again, with the help of my laptop, I was able to make the hour pretty productive (I had several stories to write, and I even got started on this column during that hour), but I felt sorry for the other people who were inconvenienced.

So in my case, some of the waits I have to endure are unavoidable. But if I can find a way to avoid waits, I'll usually explore them.

For example, at lunch time, if I go to one of the fast food places for a sandwich and find myself at the end of a long lineup, I'll usually leave and either find someplace to get some food, or go back to my office and worry about lunch later. It all depends on how hungry I am and what, if anything, I have a hankering for.

And then there are always the unexpected waits.

When you're in a store with multiple checkout lines, you always pick the one you think is going to part you with your money and get you out of the store fastest. Picking the shortest line seems to make the most sense, and that's what most of us usually do. But have we not also had the experience of picking the short line and find things stalled up ahead?

Sometimes, it's just one person causing the hold-up, obliging those behind in line to experience an unanticipated wait.

I experienced such a situation last week.

I stopped for gas at a local station, filled my tank, and then went inside to pay. There was a man ahead of me at the counter, and he proved to be quite a bottleneck in the proceedings. I was in a bit of a hurry, so I found it somewhat annoying.

He was told he was being charged \$48.01 for the gas he had just pumped into his vehicle, but he maintained that the gauge on the pump had read \$48-even, meaning he was concerned that he was being gouged for one cent. He also commented that he realized it wasn't a big deal, but more a matter of principle. Thus I was being delayed over a matter of principle involving one cent.

The idea of reaching into my pocket for a penny to plunk on the counter and end this foolishness occurred to me, but I abandoned it. For one thing, thanks to Stephen Harper and company, I no longer carry pennies. Besides, there would have been the question as to whether I had any business butting in. On the other hand, the gent in question was sort of making it my business by forcing me to stand in line and wait while this drama unfolded.

In the end, the staff of the station did the only sensible thing they could, namely they adjusted the machine and charged him \$48.

Out of curiosity, as I left the station, I went over to the pump this guy had used to see what the amount was on the gauge. It was \$48.01.

While I was a little annoyed that this joker had held me up, I did find the issue rather amusing.

I hope the man puts the money he saved to good use. It's never too early to start setting aside money for one's RRSP

