

# Certainly not the road less travelled

**By Brock Weir**

I've never necessarily been one to always want to go first.

Sure, there's nothing wrong with blazing a trail when the situation calls for it, but there are other times when sitting back and having time to reflect before speaking or acting can do us all a world of good.

Or maybe, speaking strictly from a personal perspective, that is just learned behaviour.

Despite everyone's best efforts, I was never an athlete. During our school track and field competitions, with one exception that was purely a fluke, I never merited more than a purple participant ribbon.

For the same reason, I was rarely not one of the last people picked when it was time to break into teams in gym class.

On the one hand, it was an embarrassing and all-too-regular occurrence. But, on the other hand, not being team captain, the amount of blame I had to shoulder pending the outcome of the game was rather minimal.

As one got older and more and more opportunities for public speaking, to pick one example, came about, there was another dilemma that quickly uncovered its horns: you never really wanted to go first as you wouldn't have time to suss out your audience. Yet again though, if you didn't either go first or near the beginning of the roster what you had to say ran the risk of getting stale by the time they got to you.

In the news industry, it is almost universally beneficial to get a story off first, but that is not always the case. Taking the extra time to piece together background and context can present an altogether different story than what can be slapped together and posted in just a simple effort to be first.

While living in the so-called 'information age' ? is that still what we're calling in this era? ? has exacerbated the appetite to be first or consume first, it's far from a new phenomenon.

We often see at the municipal level, for instance, the desire for one Ontario municipality to be the first out of 444 to start a movement, whether it is for or against something, sometimes for the sake of being first rather than taking the time to fully examine and evaluate the short-term and long-term consequences.

In the upper levels of government ? and, the lower tiers are not immune to this either ? there is usually an appetite amongst the elected to note trends in public discourse and be the among the first to hitch their wagons to the movement, whether through a speech or a motion to do something concrete about it.

There's nothing bad about any of this, mind you, but it's a trend that shows no signs of slowing down. Perhaps most recently we've seen this political appetite to be the first among [fill in your own blank] to see the end of the global pandemic by lifting restrictions province by province from coast to coast, pretending as if by a stroke of the pen and an arbitrarily chosen date on the calendar that we're closing the chapter on COVID and somehow moving onto a 'post-COVID' world.

'With continued improvements in trends, Ontario will remove the mandatory masking requirement for most settings on March 21, with the exception of select settings such as public transit, health care settings, long-term care homes and congregate care settings,' said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer for Ontario, in a statement just a few weeks ago before the curtain was allegedly brought down on a virus still wreaking havoc.

?As a society, we must remain kind, considerate and respectful toward those who continue wearing a mask. We must also expect indicators, such as cases and hospitalizations, to increase slightly as Ontarians increasingly interact with one another. However, thanks to our high vaccination rates and natural immunity, as well as the arrival of antivirals, Ontario has the tools necessary to manage the impact of the virus.

?I want to thank Ontarians for their ongoing resilience and commitment to community as we navigated this global pandemic together. Your sacrifices and collective actions have made a difference. While this does not signal that COVID-19 has disappeared or that the pandemic is over, it does mean that we have come to a place where we know what we need to do to manage this virus and to keep each other safe.

?We need to remain vigilant. We need to stay home when sick. And, most importantly, we need to get vaccinated and boosted.?

Speaking as a vaccinated and boosted individual, I'm getting rather tired of having to remain vigilant, and I'm sure I'm not alone here.

It seems like every time we have positive trends in the fight against COVID-19, there's a collective mindset that it's a sure sign that it's safe to go back to a pre-COVID lifestyle, the same approach that has put us in lockdown after lockdown, a cycle which seems to be a never-ending one.

I'm not going out of my way to be a downer here; I'm simply looking at other jurisdictions that lifted the bulk of their public health restrictions some weeks ago seeing data curve more in the direction of the start line than anywhere else.

Also, referring to the global pandemic in past tense, even in a thank you to Ontarians who ?navigated the global pandemic? doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

We've seen some of these landmarks on this road before and it's not exactly nostalgic to see them again.

While I look forward to the day when I personally will feel comfortable hanging up the face masks for good ? even though I've picked up a few along this two-year journey that have become more fashion than anything else ? I'm more than comfortable hanging back for a little while longer.

I'm woefully tired of stepping into any indoor setting with a mask on and battling through the fog on my glasses to see two steps in front of my face, but it seems like a small price to pay for my own peace of mind.

Speaking strictly for myself, as a matter of personal choice, I'll keep my mask on for just a little while longer, not only out of respect for the immunocompromised in my circle and community, but because this road feels strangely familiar.