This page was exported from - Caledon Citizen
Export date: Mon Sep 7 0:30:52 2026 / +0000 GMT

Countering Complaint Culture

by BROCK WEIR

The following statement might come as something of a surprise for regular readers of this column, but, believe it or not, I am not a natural-born complainer.

Don't get me wrong ? I'm not a doormat, nor am I complacent. If I see a wrong that needs to be righted, I have no qualms speaking my mind or doing my utmost to spur action towards a solution, but not all perceived wrongs are created equal.

Yet, in this highly polarized world we now find ourselves living in, our collective sense of proportionality appears to be crumbling in favour of unfettered grumbling.

Case in point, for instance, Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown put forward a motion to Region of Peel Council last week to look at imposing fines on area residents who misuse 9-1-1.

Bolstering Mayor Brown's motion was data put forward by police departments over the last little while citing people calling the emergency line to report everything from being temporarily unable to access some of their favourite cable channels to kvetching about a snafu with a Tim Horton's order.

Another incident in Peel involved someone calling 9-1-1 to complain about people playing cricket on a public path ? an inconvenience, perhaps, if you're in a running group and need a particularly wide-berth to move as one, but hardly a life-or-death situation, particularly when an individual can side-step a wicket or two.

I'm sure this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wrongly-placed complaints to Police, but, perhaps, just a selection of the ones ridiculous enough to raise both awareness and eyebrows.

?We've never seen this level of misused calls,? Brown told Newstalk 1010 last week. ?It's going up each year and that's putting an enormous pressure on 911, to the point where we have legitimate emergencies being put on hold because we have negligent calls.?

If fines or any other deterrents are ultimately effective in curtailing such nonsense, I think that is something to be applauded but, as far as complaints go, I feel it's going to be pretty difficult to get this foul-tasting toothpaste back into its proverbial tube.

In a world that is, again, as highly polarized as ours, we've also found ourselves living in a world where ?complaint culture? has taken a firm foothold.

It's not hard to identify at least one factor that has helped complaint culture gain its foothold, and that is the anonymity that our online world has fostered.

When you don't have to show your face or state your name, it is much easier to put your worst on display because said anonymity can blunt any backlash. Likewise, if you're complaining to a company's social media feed, there is a similar anonymity as far as to whom or what (thanks, bots) you're venting your spleen.

At a micro level, I'm not one to really complain if there is a minor (yes, minor) discrepancy between the order I shouted through the wind into an oh-so-inviting drive-thru speaker box versus what I get at the next window in an equally oh-so-appetizing brown paper bag. With the exception of unexpected mayonnaise or melted cheese appearing on what I ordered, two toppings I've weirdly loathed since childhood, I can usually muscle through it. I'm fully conscious that companies that operate in structures that offer drive-thru windows have streamlined their workforce in the interests of greater profit margins, despite absurdly claiming that people don't want to work anymore, and are thus placing more expectations and a greater burden on people doing the heavy lifting. Here, mistakes are

bound to happen, but am I going to raise a stink if they put just a regular amount of onions on my burger instead of the extra I requested? Come on. Just don't get me started on self-checkouts!

Now that winter has belatedly arrived, the annual sport of complaining about snow and ice maintenance, or lack thereof, has finally had its season opener ? with, as one would expect, the usual complaints from people who take umbrage at their streets not being cleared first among hundreds. This, despite more ways than ever before to track the whereabouts of local snowplows to give you a bit of insight on when your turn will come.

Experiencing a delay? Again, not a reason to call 9-1-1. The appropriate municipal department? Sure. It's not at the top of my own list, but you do you!

On a personal note, my small nuclear family is experiencing something of a significant upheaval right now ? not to worry, everyone is healthy and well ? but there is nothing we can do about it. We might complain amongst ourselves, but no manner of complaining is going to change the outcome. Instead of dwelling upon it, I'm trying, with varying levels of success, to accentuate whatever positives that might be had ? and, admittedly, there are few to be found ? if only for my own peace of mind.

As complaint culture marches on seemingly unabated, it's doing so, in my view, at the expense of ?doing culture? ? that is, people who are content just to complain about what's bothering them rather than taking action to do something about it.

For the ?small stuff,? such as those who complain about their fast food order, action can be as simple as putting themselves in the shoes, even for a moment, of those who tasked with putting the meal together.

For the big stuff, such as political action, it often feels people are more content to simply sound off on the performance of their leaders at all levels of government without (a) offering solutions to whatever has raised their ire or, (b), putting themselves forward to foster the change they want to see in the world.

And, I believe, we're all the poorer for it.

As I write this, I can't help but think of an airline snafu I had this past summer when, due to weather in Toronto, my flight back from New York City was cancelled.

The airline in question, in just about as many words, texted to say they were working hard to re-book all those impacted on the next available flight ? but, when that subsequent confirmation came thorough about an hour later, the ?next available flight? was literally a full week later.

An extra week in a ?foreign? clime, with all the expenses that would incur, was obviously unacceptable and a call to their customer service was in order.

The delay and the re-booking was, again, obviously, not the fault of whoever was going to pick up the phone at the other end and I governed myself accordingly.

?Thank you for not yelling at me,? said the clerk, almost sheepishly and exhausted by the time I got through at 2 a.m., with an audible crack in her voice and relief in the air.

?Yelling? at her was the furthest thing from my mind; all I wanted was to work with her for a practical solution ? and, working together, a much more reasonable option was found.

I'd wager the people who did, in fact, bellow down the phone might have had a full seven days ahead of them.