

Finding the time and taking the time

by BROCK WEIR

What kind of consumer are you?

When you go into a store, perhaps at the end of a long day, to get some groceries for the evening or a ready bite, do you like to grab what you need and hit the self-checkout to save time, or do you like to be a bit more leisurely about it, browse some of the aisles for out-of-the-box dinner ideas to break the monotony and check out with an all-too-rare human clerk?

In my case, while I'm a firm opponent of self-checkout, I sometimes bend my own rules when the day has turned into a terribly long slog.

If it's been a particularly arduous day and I'm on my way home later than I'd hoped when I set out that morning, I can see the value in knowing what I want to get well ahead of time, keeping a mental map handy of where it might be in any given store, and having an all-important exit plan for maximum efficiency.

At other times, if the day had been a little bit more relaxed, or a rare occasion in this job where I'm alone with my laptop, it's sometimes nice to linger over the process a little bit, take one's time, and check in with a real-life person when it's time to check out.

Maybe it's all about how much 'social bandwidth' you have at the end of the day.

I can only imagine that if you're in a forward-facing job, such as a cashier, server, or working on reception, to pick just three examples, where you need to plaster on a happy face in the morning for hours on end for dozens, or even hundreds of customers and clients, keeping that trend going once you clock out is probably the last thing you want to do - but making time for these interactions, even if you feel it's just one more thing on your plate, can be valuable.

I often think about an unlikely experience I had a few years ago when, late at night, I had to pick up the phone and dial up a call centre when experiencing what felt like a dire I.T. problem.

After a few minutes navigating my way through an automated telephone system, I finally reached a gentleman willing and able to help. It wasn't a problem that he could solve with just the tap of a button. It took a bit to find the root cause of the issue, so, at the beginning of the session, there was a bit of dead air.

When he spoke, however, it was clear that his attention was divided. After I asked him if he was okay, he mentioned he was in India and he was continually checking back in with his family elsewhere in the country that was under a serious cyclone threat.

Whatever impatience I may have been feeling at the time evaporated. The fact that an online service I was paying for was glitching seemed like small potatoes by comparison, and rightly so. He could take all the time he needed, as far as I was concerned.

With a simple question, and a simple but difficult answer, my perspective experienced a seismic shift.

I had an evening meeting on Monday night, a start to the week that turned out to be a bit more trying than I expected, and when the time to head home mercifully arrived, I decided to spring for a ride share rather than transit because, admittedly, I was a bit tired, cranky, and not in the best frame of mind.

My driver pulled up in a pretty stylin' vehicle with a number of creature comforts, and as I settled into the back seat to relax for a bit, a conversation took shape.

As it turns out, the driver just finished a rather gruelling-sounding day at a large-scale employer in the community and was just beginning an evening of driving he anticipated would take him through 3 a.m. or so. An exceedingly long day by any stretch of the imagination, particularly as he aimed to be back at work at 9 a.m. Tuesday morning, but it was all worth it, he said ? he was supporting his family and, come the weekend, was able to fully disconnect from work and give them his undivided attention.

It made my day seem like a walk in the park by comparison!

We've often heard the phrase that if you want something done, ask a busy person to do it.

While I've sometimes wondered whether that particular phrase was coined by a less motivated person looking for a sound excuse to pass the proverbial buck onto anyone but themselves, there is admittedly a grain of truth in the adage.

From this perspective, I continually marvel at what members of our communities can accomplish, whether it is a youth whose continuing volunteerism has long-surpassed the requisite hours needed to get their high school diploma, or adults who juggle their families and multiple jobs yet still are able to carve the time to fuel their passions and give back to their community, to those who have retired from a long career and, rather than just resting on their laurels to enjoy their leisure time, fill their hours in multiple volunteer capacities, determined to have an impact.

Everyone has their own story, everyone has their own motivation, all are valuable and valued, but all too often their work and accomplishments go unrecognized.

That doesn't have to be the case.

Throughout this month, our local MPs and MPPs have been collecting nominations from community members for the King's Coronation Medal, struck by the Government of Canada to mark the coronation of King Charles III.

30,000 individuals nation-wide will be recognized with the award as recognition of their contributions to: community service and philanthropy; arts and media; healthcare and medicine, science, technology, and innovation; business, industry and economy; education; politics, public service and justice; sports; and social sciences and humanities.

On Sunday, which marked the second anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the throne, I witnessed a presentation of ten medals by Ontario Lieutenant Governor Edith Dumont and the accomplishments of those recognized were impressive in both their large-scale contributions to this country and myriad smaller community-level contributions that came together to form an impressive, invaluable whole.

What a remarkable way to honour our everyday heroes who, through contributions large and small, have undoubtedly made a difference ? even those aforementioned ?busy people? who are continually asked to take on more than their fair share because they're efficient at what they do!

If you know someone who fits the bill, take time out of your own schedules to contact your local MP or MPP and shine a light on these individuals who keep our communities great places to live, work, play ? and shop.