

Inclusive perspectives

by BROCK WEIR

As a journalists, our job is to ask the tough questions on behalf of the people of this community.

Of course, what constitutes 'tough' in our minds might be the easiest, breeziest question for whoever the question is directed to ? after all, chances are they're likely the experts in their field.

The questions, in some cases, might help shed light on an issue, the development of an innovation, or the next phase in something that will make a real difference to our readers and the towns in which they live.

In other cases, they're sometimes questions we already know the answer to, but it's always beneficial to hear it come out of the mouth of the proverbial horse.

'If you can explain it in your own words,' is sometimes the language we use to preface the question lest the person we're speaking with think we're either complete fools or woefully unprepared.

At least, this is how I try to approach things because, truth be told, there are few things that annoy me more when I'm 'off-duty' than being asked a question I know full well the other person knows the answer to.

Sometimes they're trying to make a point. Sometimes they're going the roundabout way to kindly point out an error; sometimes they're going in the roundabout way in the hopes that a shortcoming will bubble to the surface.

Other times it's painfully clear that your conversation partner is itching to spar.

The other day I received an email that came out of the blue and more than a year too late.

The missive questioned our policy of sometimes, when the occasion warrants, inviting an individual or organization to respond to something submitted to us.

In this case, it was a matter of asking a person with the lived experience in question to provide insight and context on a piece that was written without having travelled that specific road themselves. Without that context, it's nothing more than being on the outside looking in.

The more recent writer's position was that inviting another voice into the conversation to provide additional and, in my opinion, valuable perspective was somehow diminishing the 'spirit' of what was originally written. At best. At worst, they continued, it was a matter of attempting to stifle conversation, or even taking a so-called side.

There was no particular side, nor was there an effort to disparage. It was simply a matter of ensuring a fuller picture. This is in the best spirit of facilitating a 'public square,' the original intent of editorial pages.

In this day and age, people generally seem to be (or are becoming) all too comfortable living within echo chambers, seeking validation of their views rather than gaining new perspectives through the process of dialogue.

We see it all the time on any social media platform.

We sometimes see it, albeit mostly further afield, in the odd corridor of power.

We sometimes see it in our day to day lives.

But trendiness can only go so far.

In more recent years, I am seeing more and more that when these echo chambers are in any way penetrated by a counterpoint, it's dismissed in short order as an example of 'woke' thinking no matter what the original point was.

But just what does 'woke' mean in this context ? or any other context for that matter?

I'm damned if I know.

As far as I can tell, it's become a catch-all term for anything that people disagree with.

In our most recent municipal election, for example, a number of education trustee candidates running for office across Ontario ran on platforms that boiled down to 'anti-woke' policies.

This idea was sometimes re-phrased as a push-back against 'identity politics' (i.e.: showing respect for how someone identifies. The political elements of that, of course, often being added to the brew by those who desire to make it so) or in the valiant-sounding quest to 'empower' parents? to do something or other.

Some pegged their views to support to a particular catch-all, ready-made platform which, among other things, says it's 'time to remove extremist political ideology from the classrooms.'

They define 'wokeism' as 'unconcealed hostility towards unprivileged members of society who have not internalized faddish ideas about race and gender' and deride inclusive acronyms 2SLGBTQIA+ and BIPOC.

Yet, in the same breath, they call for the promotion of diversity 'only if it is implemented in ways which don't divide people.' By whose definition?

That's certainly a tall order given that much of the language on the road of this goal can do nothing but divide people and, in the end, call for an end to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs if they 'deem them to be rooted in illiberal, critical social justice-based narratives' and so forth, arguing this teaches 'resentment.'

Personally, despite the best efforts of, in my view, all too many people who argue otherwise, I don't see how recognizing social inequities that exist in our system and looking for constructive ways to address the situation is divisive without a highly concerted effort to make it so.

Nor do I see that recognizing our history warts and all, well beyond the sanitized and sometimes inaccurately bucolic first round of Heritage Minutes from the 1990s is a bad thing ? and, you know what? Canada, as great as it is, is not without its share of historical residue that needs to be cleaned up. Nor are we alone among nations in this reality.

Nor is recognizing the way someone identifies, including their pronouns, is not some newfangled ideology that came out of nowhere; it's simply a mark of respect. Try walking a mile in their shoes first.

And ensuring that all voices are represented, particularly those with lived experience on a particular issue, is not taking a 'side,' it's simply a matter of making sure these pages are reflective of the communities we serve.

As such, and as always, send your views to brock@lpcmedia.ca.