

Maintaining personal bandwidth amid uncertainty

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

It seems like a lifetime ago when, just before Premier Ford made the call to put Ontario into shut-down mode during the first wave of COVID-19, I left the office feeling it would be the last time I would be back there, at least for a while.

Back up the stairs I went on that late-winter Friday to pack up as much as I thought I would need to keep my end of the paper going on Monday, Tuesday, and however long the uncertainty might last. After all, as you'll undoubtedly recall, it was a shutdown that was only slated to last a few weeks.

It turns out that was an underestimate of the highest order.

As those weeks turned into months, it was a matter of finding things to maintain the feeling of productivity, even when there was very little to do ? or, rather, could be done ? outside of the home.

To give myself a bit of a routine, I opened up the back of my notebook and made a longhand chart. Its purpose was to track the daily case counts to quickly see any trends in the ebb and flow of new cases of the virus. Hardly ground-breaking stuff, but it helped break up the feeling of monotony while at the same time replacing it with the vaguest sense of purpose.

The red pen was deployed for days that saw a bump in the numbers, while the green pen had its moment in the sun on those merciful days where a decline was recorded.

Late winter turned inevitably into early spring and the early spring into summer, it was wonderful to have the red pen packed away more often than not.

As more people were getting outside into the warmth of the sun, our collective case numbers were going down and we were able to cautiously resume some of our regular summer activities.

Then, as the sun faded into the fall and the holidays were once again on the horizon, the green pen was given a begrudging break.

We were on the rise again as the cold drove people back into the artificial warmth of close quarters and, just in time for the holiday season, we were in lockdown again. A silver lining for my colourful writing instruments was they were dusted off and put to work again, but, truth be told, I would have been happy if they never saw the light of day again.

Yet, desperate times call for desperate measures, and the tracking began again, this time spiced up by looking for any new trends as vaccines were rolled out.

The second time around, the novelty ran out quickly and the pens went away. As light appeared at the end of our collective tunnel, it seemed like an exercise in futility ? not that it wasn't already ? and instead, vaccines were the much happier stat to track.

Until they weren't.

As glad as I was to see the most vulnerable members of our community get jabbed, for many of us there was the added layer of keeping track of ever-evolving timelines on when certain demographics would reach eligibility for both ourselves, our parents, and our other loved ones.

When our loved ones' times came, it became even more complex as the hunt for vaccine appointments before their full expansion to pharmacies and doctors' offices was almost like volunteering for the Hunger Games. A full day of online refreshing could sometimes come to naught and you were forced to start the whole process the next morning, just hoping for a bit of luck.

Thankfully, that extra level of stress soon dissipated as supply came closer to reaching demand and we were able to enjoy a summer and fall that came closer still to the ones we enjoyed in 2019 and prior.

It gave us time to decompress ? while hopefully not letting our guard down ? and store up some extra mental bandwidth for the season ahead.

And now, as we know, we certainly need it.

We're back in this seemingly never-ending cycle. Numbers are rising again both due to people more inclined to stay indoors than brave the coldness of the season and, of course, with the question mark that remains the Omicron variant.

As eligibility for booster shots ? or, a ?third dose? as we're now being encouraged to call it ? expands, we're chomping at the bit, ready to begin hunting down time slots for our loved ones and ourselves, just hoping it won't be as dog-eat-dog as the last go round.

Sometimes it feels like we're on a go-round that is far from merry in that we're all travelling the same path but making few strides forward.

It can be frustrating and, in some cases, infuriating, but what choice do we have?

A lot has been asked of us over the last 21 months or so, some of which was unimaginable on that Friday evening in March of 2020, but we have come this far and we can't simply stop doing our part just because we're tired of the hassle or just plain weary over the constant uncertainty.

We don't yet know what Omicron will bring to us, but we weathered Delta.

We've made it through the ?tough mudder? that was finding appointments for our first and second shots before it became a free-for-all.

We made it, for better or worse, through socially-distanced family gatherings during the winter season.

And we will weather this as well ? as long as we collectively keep our eyes on the finish line.

If there is another silver lining to come out of COVID's winter doldrums, it might just be that we've learned ? or re-learned ? the importance of decompressing, recognizing the limits of our own personal mental bandwidths (and adjusting what we do accordingly), and finding ways to find and keep the joy in our lives.

But, as winter approaches, I am curious as to how you're keeping yourselves in check.

Send your thoughts, tips and tricks to brock@lpcmedia.ca.