

Plugging the brain drain?

by BROCK WEIR

How do you measure success?

I suppose it depends on just how you define it and what you're evaluating.

Maybe it's your career. Maybe it's your family life.

Maybe it's simply the satisfaction at the end of the day that you've done something of value ? for yourself or others ? over the course of the previous 24 hours. Maybe it's just a matter of sticking to your personal moral compass or staying true to who you are, however you come to define yourself against the myriad challenges that are regularly flung our way.

There are no wrong answers.

If you define yourself by your job or vocation, it could be measured by the esteem in which you're held by your peers ? such as a tenured professor, a family doctor that has served generations of the same family, or a member of a professional organization ? or the impact you've had on the community you call home, or your industry, or your field.

Young athletes looking to hit that next level, for instance, might measure their success by whether or not they land a scholarship to an American university. That's nothing to sneeze at, mind you, but sometimes it seems that, as a result, great homegrown athletes who choose to study in Canada and either keep their eyes on professional sport or pursue a different vocation while keeping their sporting passion at the amateur level, are sometimes left just adjacent from the spotlight.

In our political life, it often seems like there are those who derive a feeling of success through serving their constituents in the community, at Queen's Park, or on Parliament Hill. But, by the same token, there are others who might measure the same success by whether or not they can make the leap to an office they see as higher, regardless of whether the mandate at hand ? given to them by voters ? has been completed. (Prime Ministers excepted because, as recent examples have shown, there is only one way to go once you're there!)

Then, of course, there is our cultural sector.

We don't have to go far to find examples of musicians, actors, or comedians who might not think they've truly ?made it? until they become household names stateside or globally.

Yet, are those measures held just by those who feel the need to get out the ruler, or do we as Canadians hold them to others as well?

When you get down to it, we Canadians are curious creatures. As much as we support our homegrown talent in arts and entertainment ? a possible exception being many elements of the music industry ? the passion in which we do so is usually most evident while they are ?on the way up.? Yet, when they get there, all too often they're looked on by us as ?just a Canadian? actor (for example) if they stay here and, if they leave our borders for the next chapter in their careers, many scoff and sniff, ?Well, they thought they were too big for us.?

Unless, of course, they achieve phenomenal fame on the international stage, then all is seemingly forgiven and, most importantly, forgotten!

I've heard Academy Award-winning British actress Kate Winslet describe this in an interview as ?tall poppy syndrome? in which if one is deemed to be getting too high for the others, are patted back down ? subtly or otherwise. Maybe it's a Commonwealth thing.

I was thinking about this just before settling in at my desk to write this, but in the context of the medical field where so many of our homegrown doctors either pursue their degrees at American universities that have a particular prestige and stay there, or perhaps leave for the States after successfully establishing themselves in Canada.

The common view is this is always to maximize profits, but this is not always the case, as was highlighted Monday by the CBC.

Reporter Campbell MacDiarmid reports that Ottawa-based heart surgeon Marc Ruel was headed to the San Francisco campus of the University of California to lead their cardiac surgery department until last fall's Presidential election and the subsequent threats to Canada's sovereignty.

'Canada is under duress right now. I felt my role and duty at this point was to directly serve my country from within,' he told the CBC.

MacDiarmid continues: 'Ruel says he considers his skills a product of Canada, abilities that he was ready to share globally when he accepted the position last year. 'In the western United States, no one does this more advanced, minimally invasive multiple bypass surgery,' he said. 'I don't want to do politics, I'm a surgeon, I'm not a politician, and I respect every nation's choice to choose their own destiny.' But Trump's imposition of tariffs and threats to annex the country that's historically been its closest ally has made geopolitics an unavoidable issue.

'I had to most unfortunately change my decision,' Ruel said. 'I say unfortunately because there were patients there in California, I can tell you, who were looking forward to having this type of surgery.' Given the broader context, Ruel says staying put was the best decision. 'I'm very happy to be here and serve, as well as I can, my fellow Canadians.'

Doctors on the other side of the equation - that is, American doctors who are now looking at opportunities to bring their profession to Canada - declined to speak to the CBC on the record, but recruiter Michelle Flynn indicated enquiries to come north have 'more than doubled over the last several months' and, by the same token, questions from Canadians looking to head south have been waning.

Canada has lived far too long with a brain drain, but in some respects, the tide might be turning. If - to quote Melanie Joly - the 'psychodrama' inflicted upon us semi-monthly by President Trump has any positives, helping to plug the brain drain might be one positive we can hold onto in this mess. It might also be an economic boost as well!

In a recent conversation with Debra Wilson, Interim Executive Director of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, on the importance of spring home shows in our communities to underscore the idea of shopping local, she stressed that as important as the 'Shop Local' principle is, 'Support Local' is just as important, if less punchy-sounding.

That, in my view, is very true.

We send messages with our dollars - we have and we should continue to do so - but there are other ways to send messages and strengthen the home front: and that includes supporting, recognizing and fostering the talent we have at home, celebrating their successes. This also includes those talented ones who are proudly flying Brand Canada abroad and, in turn, doing us proud - even if some are loath for some reason to admit it!