

Shifting Resiliency

by BROCK WEIR

In today's fast-paced world, it's probably advisable to try and be a bit flexible.

So many things around us are changing and evolving at a pace that is nothing short of breakneck. The rules of the game are constantly being rewritten and it is incumbent upon all of us to try to keep up or risk getting swamped by? well, any number of things presently swirling around our planet that threaten to do just that.

That's not to say we're not a resilient species, if you forgive my using a word we're all thoroughly sick of.

Our collective experience during the Global Pandemic illustrated we had stores of resiliency within ourselves that we otherwise wouldn't have been able to comprehend. By and large, we rolled within whatever punches circumstances had in store for us, and there were probably more punches to roll with than we ever could have envisioned at the outset.

Nevertheless, we did what we could.

Our day-to-day lives experienced a significant shift. Many of us had downtime that allowed for introspection. We were forced to reprioritize so many things in our lives that were once seen of the utmost importance, we had to re-define many of our relationships, what we expected of ourselves, what we expected of others, and we had to re-think just about every aspect of our society that made it functional.

Some of those shifts were practical, some showed general improvement on what was in place previously, some were pale imitations of the so-called 'before-times.' We went into the 'new' with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but a general consensus that this is simply what we had to do 'at least for now.

Some of what we were tasked to do were taller orders than others, some shifts which we were told mere months before the first lockdown were impossible.

Prior to the major shutdown, to pick just one example, we were told that it simply wasn't possible under the Ontario Municipal Act for citizen-led advisory committees to be held virtually. The reasons why this was impossible were myriad, although some of the apparent reasons were better than others.

Left without an alternative, the impossible was suddenly very possible and subject of a new structure put in place relatively swiftly, and this model stays with us because, in a twist that was no surprise to anyone, making these committees more accessible and their work more transparent and readily available is a good thing all around.

This new level of engagement is more or less an outlier in some of the COVID concessions that are still with us. We generally kept the shifts that made sense and improved the situation in question, and mercifully went back to time-tested practices in other areas.

Importantly, we were able to exercise critical thought in what made sense, what should stick around, what should be consigned to the history bins, and what rules were worth re-learning.

And the rules are being rewritten every day.

Last week, Prime Minister Mark Carney made a landmark speech at the World Economic Forum which was held by many around the world as a watershed moment in how countries like Canada are working to redefine their respective relationships around the world.

While views on the speech here at home were positive-to-mixed, generally speaking, it was fascinating to see the international reaction to the Prime Minister's words, with so many citing it as a valuable example of international leadership in what is perceived to be a recent leadership vacuum.

'Today, I'll talk about the rupture in the world order, the end of a nice story and the beginning of a brutal reality where geopolitics among the great powers is not subject to any constraints,' he began. 'But I also submit to you that other countries, particularly middle powers like Canada, are not powerless. They have the capacity to build a new order that embodies our values, like respect for human rights, sustainable development, solidarity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of states.'

'The power of the less powerful begins with honesty. It seems that every day we're reminded that we live in an era of great power rivalry. That the rules-based order is fading. That the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must'. There is a strong tendency for countries to go along to get along. To accommodate. To avoid trouble. To hope that compliance will buy safety. It won't. So, what are the options?'

'We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false. That the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient. That trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And we knew that the international law applied with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim. This fiction was useful. And American hegemony, in particular, helped provide public goods: open sea lanes, a stable financial system, collective security, and support for frameworks for resolving disputes. So, we placed the sign in the window. We participated in the rituals. And we largely avoided calling out the gaps between rhetoric and reality. This bargain no longer works.'

Carney made a comprehensive case in his speech on why the bargain no longer works, and the importance of protecting yourself when the rules no longer protect you.

The reaction was as swift as it was predictable - Canada being disinvited from participation in the fledgling and questionably-structured Board of Peace and living under threats of 100 per cent tariffs.

It's almost as if certain parties went out of their way to underscore and bolster the point that Carney was making - but it also drove home there's no way to line up a goal if the opposing team keeps moving said goalposts.

While Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre praised Carney's 'eloquence' before going point by point through the speech through the partisan lens, which is his job as Leader of the Opposition, there was some common ground to be found in his response.

'So far, Mr. Carney has been lucky that he's been judged by his rhetoric and his stated intentions, by the number of his trips and meetings overseas,' he said. 'Because, nearly a year into his term, the rhetoric has changed, but reality has not. There is an illusion of purpose, but no results to back it up.'

'We need to do things, not just say them. 'Canada Strong' can no longer be a slogan, nor 'True North Strong and Free' just a motto. We must put our people and country first in all that we do. Then, and only then, we will be autonomous and affordable, secure, and self-reliant.'

'?. We are the masters of our fate. We are the captains of our souls. It's time we finally take the wheel - and steer Canada forward with purpose and resolve.'

Now that Parliament is back this week, it's time to do just that.

While the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have found general agreement in what the reality is, a surprisingly tall order today, now is a time to for all to come together with purpose and resolve for our collective strength, freedom and, to utter that dreaded word again, resilience.