

The Carrot and the Stick

by SHERALYN ROMAN

We'll start today's column with a brief history lesson.

At some point or another in life, regardless of your place or origin, you've likely been exposed to the theory of motivation based on the carrot and stick. It might go by other names, perhaps a different vegetable (turnips, in one example we found) is the motivator; but the concept remains the same. It is a metaphor for the use of a combination of reward and punishment to induce desired behaviour.

The carrot, of course, assuming one is motivated by vegetables, is the positive motivator, and the stick, it should be self-evident, is a negative motivational tool. It's a simplistic model of human behaviour that pays little attention to other factors. (intrinsic motivation or Maslow's model comes to mind.) Yet, I can't help but feel there is a whole lot of the 'carrot and stick' philosophical approach to motivation going on right now at the Provincial government level.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting pretty tired of being the donkey, flogged by the stick while attempting to keep up with the carrot dangling in front of me.

What follows is my general assessment of the carrot and stick philosophy that seems to be guiding the current Provincial government through their decision-making process. I hope you'll indulge me.

Carrot: Good news, the Province is opening!

Stick: Bad news, the Province might decide to close at any time!

Carrot: The good news is only good news for certain public health units - you folks are the lucky ones, for now.

Stick: The bad news is some of us have been 'very, very bad' and must remain in lockdown.

Carrot: The good news is most of you small business people can open again so go ahead and staff up, buy lots of food if you are in the restaurant business or invest in new stock for Spring if you're a small business owner.

Stick: Don't worry about 'the stick,' trust us, we're working in your best interests. Sure, we might pull the plug at any moment and close you back down. If we do, it's for your own good.

Carrot - not followed by a Stick: In more good news, for all you 'average citizens' - don't worry, we'll never shut critical services like big box retailers and coffee shops located on every corner. We know how important your morning cup of 'Joe' is while you're driving towards these 'essential' destinations.

I could continue along those lines but it might make for a lengthy use of column space and I'm sure you get the general idea. So back to paragraphs it is.

There is more good news; this time for parents and children everywhere, school is opening back up. Lucky us, it appears COVID doesn't spread in schools at all. The bad news is Mr. Lecce has postponed your March Break. Who needs a reward for all that hard effort navigating a crazy school year, online learning, or working or learning in 'safe' schools that have yet to see one of the hundreds of nurses hired to support them? Certainly not students and teachers!

Finally, in the best news of all - the Province is opening most of the province. We may have said that already. BUT folks - beware

the new variants. The new variants are here. They are spreading at an alarming rate. We could be staring down case numbers in the thousands by early April!

‘It’s a precarious time,’ says Dr. David Williams, and we could be facing a third wave. But also, don’t be too afraid because we’re letting you have your March Break ‘ in April ‘ right after Easter. Because that makes perfect sense, letting us all roam freely just as we anticipate that third wave of COVID-19 and most of us still have no idea if, or when, we’ll be receiving the vaccine.

By the way, here was the reasoning for postponing March Break for those of you who missed it: ‘to protect schools and avoid a repeat of the concerning spike in youth-related cases over the winter break, when students and staff were out of schools for a prolonged period of time. We are taking this precaution based on advice from health experts, including the province’s Science Table and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to help protect against the emerging COVID-19 variants of concern.’

Wait, what? I don’t know about you but now, I’m not only confused, I’m also beginning to hate both carrots and sticks in equal measure.