



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Feds finally get tougher

It's nice to see the federal government finally showing some muscle in its dealings with Quebec.

Undoubtedly, there is at long last at least the beginnings of a strategy on the part of the feds to play a little hardball with the separatists, in light of the recent Supreme Court decision setting down the ground rules for separation.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien has indicated that it is he and the federal government who will set the ground rules for what will be a majority of merit seeking separation.

Mr. Chretien has made reference to the criteria applied in other countries for creating significant changes, such as amending the U.S. Constitution. In that case two-thirds is the magic number, as it is, Mr. Chretien noted, for choosing a new pope.

This train of thought puts Mr. Chretien on a collision course with Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard, who steadfastly maintains that 50 per cent plus one is all he needs to win a secession referendum.

If there was ever any doubt, it is now clear that Mr. Chretien holds the moral and legal high ground in this fundamental debate. Mr. Bouchard would sunder a country on the most slim of majorities to achieve his own ends, and had said so prior to any input from the highest court in the land.

Mr. Chretien wouldn't behave in such a reckless fashion, and would require that far greater numbers of Quebecers agree to leave Canada before granting such a wish. In the interests of the country and people as a whole, he is on far firmer footing than the whining, conniving, opportunistic separatists are, have been or will be in the future.

Editors are gatekeepers, not the most popular job

One of the main functions of a newspaper editor is to act as gatekeeper, that is, to make sure standards don't tumble, to guard against slipshod practices.

This will never make one the most popular person in any business. When people try to get away with things, you have to tell them they've crossed a line.

Sometimes it works and sometimes it's highly frustrating.

It almost always works in dealing with reporters. If there are 'holes' in a reporter's story, or if the writing is cumbersome, difficult to follow, it is strongly suggested that the facts be more clearly displayed or the language cleaned up.

Something you hear from junior reporters is that the "story is between the reader and I", or that "The reader will understand what I mean."

Well, no the reader won't because he or she is never going to see that version of the work.

It is the editor's job to advocate on behalf of the reader, to protect the reader from any bad habits the reporters may have picked up.

In another area, a pet peeve of mine is what has become known as 'advertorial', which is a meaningless word used to describe a sometimes

highly dubious product.

Advertorial is advertising copy made to look like news stories. It is often an attempt to cash in on the hard-earned credibility of the news product by making ads look like the news.

In our company, there are some respectable guidelines for the use of advertorial copy. Some people try to skirt them, especially junior sales reps who don't know any better.

Years ago a very junior sales rep brought in an ad that her customer had told her to make look exactly like a story, with the same type and headline styles used for news, run at the same size.

I told her no, she could not do that. "But that's what the customer wants", she said. Yes, but what the customer wanted was unethical, whether they knew it or not.

Even though guidelines in our corporation discourage the sort of behaviour the young sales rep was indulging in, it happens.

In some papers, they get away with writing 'advertorial' at the top of the paid ad that is supposed to look like a story. But I would suggest that if you stopped 10 people on the street, nine would have no idea what 'advertorial' means, so I always ask them to put 'advertisement' on the



OUR READERS WRITE

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Stroller says he sees big mess during rush hour

Dear Editor:

It's time again to bring to light what's happening on the streets of our town.

A stroll down Ontario Street during the hours of 7 to 9 a.m. or 4 to 6 p.m. leaves the writer appalled at the lack of concern or knowledge of road safety.

To cite a few of the infractions that occur on a daily basis: speeding, running red lights, following too closely, failing to signal turn, ignoring crosswalks and failing to stop at stop signs.

Is it possible that our law enforcement officers are unaware of these infractions?

If so, maybe this letter will inform them of my inter-

est in the safety of those who do obey the law.

Donald Smith
Milton

Milton a caring community

Dear Editor:

May we say thank you to the numerous and courteous drivers who helped when our car failed at Steeles Avenue and Tremaine Road recently.

In pouring rain two young men pushed us back from this dangerous area and another let us use his phone.

Scannel Moving truck drivers nicely pushed us across the road and prompt action by Durante Towing and Richardson Chev-Olds brought us safely home.

Freda Best-Strain
Milton



Rob
Kelly

top instead.

In terms of actually doing stories about this or that, the editor will often find him or herself in the position of having to say 'no', which is never any fun. However, as you can imagine, many people would like stories done about themselves or their relatives or their businesses.

If you ask them what the 'hook' would be -- what will draw a reader into it, often their request begins to fall apart with a reply such as, "I don't know. I just thought it would be a good story."

There has to be something in there that will intrigue others.

And of course, many people call with excellent story proposals, so don't be afraid to ask if your idea is news or not. The worst that you can

be told is 'no thanks.'

It is amazing to me how vividly people remember stories involving them over the years, especially controversial things.

I ran into a former company president in a gym one day, and he described an incident more than a decade old that had appeared in the paper, and how he appreciated the manner in which it was handled. He looked a bit crestfallen when it was clear that I had only the vaguest memory of what he was talking about.

Another woman apparently told a friend of mine the other day that she was somewhat nervous about talking to me because she had been characterized as an opportunist during a minor political fracas years ago.

This too is lost in the mists of time from my perspective, and relates to an era when I wrote controversial columns, something that would be rare today since the nature of work has changed for me.

Running across these people -- and it happens more often than you might think -- is both instructive and humbling. You realize the impact something you write can have, even years later.

You want to make sure you're up to the task, the responsibility. You can't let things slide.