

Opinion

Garbage and you - a look at the big picture

Why is it that garbage trucks always have squeaky brakes? While there are other mysteries of the universe more immediately profound, last week I was most concerned.

It was then suggested to me that garbage trucks have squeaky brakes because they stop a lot. That made sense, so I quickly lost interest.

The whole episode, so mundane in everyday life, has sparked a larger issue. Why is it that our questions can only rarely be answered so easily?

Now that I've got you thinking, what's the square root of 15,129? Why don't they send poets into space? Why isn't the plural of spouse, spice? Why are you still reading this column?

I can answer the last question. You're still reading the column because you're curious. You want to find out where it's leading. It is, in fact, leading to a conclusion which will shock you, disturb you, sadden you and finally surprise you. That's if I manage to come up with an ending that lives up to the advance billing.

If I can't manage to scale those heights, I simply erase the previous paragraph and substitute one which conforms to the final few words of the piece. Simple, isn't it?

Curiosity has driven mankind to accomplishments which even two decades ago would have been difficult to believe. We, the television generation, are used to revelations in science and technology. We live in a world changing so fast that we are conditioned to those changes. If the world ceased to change we might, conceivably, be driven mad.

If it is our eagerness to understand things which drives the world forward, it follows that our questions must be those which are not easily answered. In a static world we would be more concerned with absolutes and quantifiable knowledge. We would be content to simply memorize all the answers.

While a solution to the garbage truck puzzle seems on the surface to answer the question, perhaps there is more to it than meets the eye. Perhaps the real reason for squeaky brakes can

Reaume with a view
with BRAD REAUME



be found in the particular function a garbage truck fulfills.

Perhaps the fumes from the rotting, smelly, vile, bacteria-infested remains cause the brake linings to deteriorate quickly. Perhaps the material in brake linings performs at an optimum level outside the morning hours because morning is more humid generally than the rest of the day. Thus the time in which the trucks are usually functioning might affect their performance.

Then again, the brakes might be shot because of the weight of all the junk the truck is forced to carry around. If we were to recycle more of our waste, perhaps a spin-off effect would be quieter garbage trucks and lower maintenance costs.

People would sleep easier, which would allow them to create better solutions for the myriad of other problems which plague mankind. We would have lower taxes due to the reduced cost of public works.

This in turn might generate an economic boom, with the extra dollars being spent on goods, thereby creating jobs and more taxable income and more garbage, which would again send our market economies into a recession-driven tailspin as the whole house of cards collapsed due to the weight of our waste.

Adam Smith was wrong. The crux of the free economy is not the "invisible hand" which guides the nation's economic performance; rather, it is the visible hands and legs and minds which carry the vile, smelly, bacteria-laden rot to the curb. Garbage rules the world. Shocked? Distrubed? Saddened? Surprised? I am

Johnson's letter is full of errors

For those of you who haven't been following the issue, councillor Bill Johnson and I are exchanging rather stinging attacks over details of the logo debacle town council has been grappling with for the last few weeks.

The story in a nutshell: Councillor Johnson has attempted to take me to the Ontario Press Council, a quasi-judicial body which oversees the conduct of our medium. Most newspapers in Ontario belong to the press council, and if the council deems one lacking in ethics or reporting techniques, it renders a judgement against it, which the member newspaper must publish.

Mr. Johnson could not gain any support at municipal council when he proposed taking me to the press council over coverage of the logo affair. I, in turn, wrote an editorial in the Jan. 24 issue critical of Mr. Johnson on several fronts. In last Wednesday's paper, he sent a letter replying to that editorial. His letter contains a good many misrepresentations, so I'm going to point out some of the areas in which Mr. Johnson erred.

Mr. Johnson alleges that he is "not the one who seeks *The Champion's* reporter when not much is happening in town," as a defence against me saying he has "an insatiable urge for the spotlight."

His memory fails him. I have never called councillor Johnson except to seek his opinion concerning an ongoing issue. He, on the other hand, has called me not only to suggest stories involving him, but to complain that he has not

Viewpoint
with ROB KELLY



been quoted enough or given enough credit in articles.

Councillor Johnson indicates that I appear to feel I should be above criticism "particularly from those he so readily criticizes."

I am not above criticism. I have other people edit my copy, I discuss story approaches with other people and listen to their critiques. And we publish letters which are often critical of my work or the work of other staff members. I am critical of public officials in editorials because it is part of my job, and our responsibility. I take no particular joy in it, especially when that criticism is aimed at people I genuinely like, such as Mayor Gord Krantz.

I take exception to Mr. Johnson's criticism in this instance because it is malicious. He did not discuss the matter with me, but he discussed it with my boss, publisher Ian Oliver. He did not simply ask for a correction or clarification of the statement in the Jan. 17 issue of *The Champion* to which he took exception, that there had been an "unintentional miscount" of ballots at a council meeting. He went for the jugular,

trying to discredit me publicly.

He alleged that I have been guilty of "mis-reporting of (council) meetings" and that it has "gone on too long." I have already replied to that by saying it is a false statement we could sue him over if we so chose (we won't - it isn't worth the bother).

In his letter councillor Johnson consistently refers to me as a "reporter" and criticizes *Champion* editor Jane Muller by suggesting "it is less than ethical to permit a reporter to use editorial privileges against someone who has taken him to task." Mr. Johnson also takes exception "to that same reporter using the plural 'we' in that same editorial."

I am not a reporter, I am the news editor, although I sometimes act as a reporter and enjoy it. As the news editor, at least at this newspaper, I write the editorials every week, unless Jane Muller feels extremely strongly about a subject and elects to write one.

Since I write 99 per cent of the editorials, I am responsible for shaping the stance of the newspaper on what I view as important issues facing the community. So I am not acting as "guest editor" to get even with councillor Johnson. And I use the editorial "we" because it is the opinion of the newspaper. And by the way, the editorial concerning councillor Johnson was screened by both Ms Muller and Ian Oliver.

Mr. Johnson proudly states that if he "took criticism personally", he would be "in a

padded cell somewhere."

I suggest to you, councillor, that you take criticism personally all the time. It's just that you are not used to media criticism. When I publicly criticized you in an editorial about your deplorable conduct and comments concerning homosexuals at regional council, you circulated an amateur-looking press release to regional reporters questioning my sexual orientation. That's taking things personally.

Council has no reason to fear "political assassination" by *The Champion*, as Mr. Johnson suggested in his letter. We would quickly lose credibility in Milton if we acted in such an irresponsible fashion. Indeed, it is Mr. Johnson who indulges in witch hunts and vendettas. In that same letter he calls his fellow councillors "lily livered", and says they are "not prepared to stand behind (municipal) staff even when staff acts on their instructions."

It's a lot stronger than saying that in his opinion councillors made a collective error in judgement. Mr. Johnson would rather, it appears, call his fellow elected officials cowards.

Also, consider this; although he didn't get municipal approval to launch a complaint against me at the Ontario Press Council, indeed didn't even get a seconder for his motion to do so, he sent the press council a copy of his letter anyway. And he went over publisher Ian Oliver's head and sent a copy to the president of our corporation, John Baxter, too. But I had a feeling he'd do something like that.

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