

Comment & Opinions

Saturday, September 20, 1997
Vol. 13, No. 38

Send your letters
to the editor
to the address below

EDITORIAL

Education reforms should not be stalled

The ongoing struggle between the provincial government and the teachers' unions has a lot of people frustrated and confused. Both sides have dug in their heels and unloaded contradicting statistics — at taxpayers' expense — which seemingly support their contentions.

In an effort to chisel away at this mountain of data, we offer the following.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, in 1986 we spent \$8.2 billion on education and our system was envied and copied all over the world. Today, with budget of \$13.2 billion for 2.2 million pupils (including the separate boards and special needs students), one would think our system should continue to have no equal.

Not so, say the latest results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Ontario students ranked dead last in Canada, internationally we were an even bigger embarrassment, falling below world averages.

One would have to agree that something has gone amiss.

Little wonder that in October of last year 22 university professors, dismayed by the abilities of many of our high school grads, felt compelled to issue a plea for education reform while demanding higher standards.

The implications of an education system with a poor global reputation are ominous not only for children's future but for our future as a society.

Polls confirm that parents want changes.

Granted there is great debate between teachers and the ministry as to what sort of education reforms are the right ones. However, we simply can't continue on as we are — doing nothing while our present and future students suffer.



Being fired made all the difference

The trouble with unemployment is that the minute you wake up in the morning, you're on the job.

Slappy White

Ever been fired?

I don't mean downsized, de-hired, streamlined or any of the other weasel euphemisms currently in vogue. I'm talking about flat-out, in your face, slam dunk canned. Where somebody with a bigger desk than yours looks you in the eye and tells you, "We don't want you to work here anymore."

I have. No one could call it a pleasant experience, getting fired. It's hard

on your wallet and on your self-esteem. It's been 25 years since my old boss in the Globe and Mail advertising department called me into his office and ominously closed the door behind me.

I remember now that everybody in the office was looking studiously down at their desk as I disappeared into the inner sanctum. They already knew what I was about to learn. A quarter of a century and I can still feel the humiliation.

No hard feelings, mind you. They were absolutely right to fire me. As a newspaper advertising salesman I was



Basic Black

Arthur Black

a total disaster. Each workday morning I'd exit the Globe and Mail office, with my fellow salesmen. Like button-down lemmings we'd march out of the office, briefcases at our side to "make calls" on prospective customers.

Actually, we usually slipped around the corner and into a greasy spoon where we sipped bad coffee and told worse jokes. Then about quarter to ten we'd all straighten our ties, check our shoeshines, grab our briefcases and hit the pavement.

The other guys went off to make their calls, just as good salesmen are supposed to. I pretended to be doing the same thing but after a furtive glance or two, I strolled a few blocks to a poolroom where I shot eight ball until the movie houses opened.

Or I went to the YMCA and ran laps on the indoor track. Or I checked my briefcase in a bus station locker and wandered around the museum. Anything but sell advertising. I hated selling.

It couldn't go on, of course, and it didn't. After just a few weeks my dismal performance came to the attention of my boss, and the rest was history. As was I.

And it's taken 25 years for me to realize that getting fired was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Because imagine if I'd turned out to be a hotshot — or even a mediocre — salesman?

Chances are I would have stayed in that line of work.

Chances are I'd be selling ad space

today. And still hating every moment of it.

Besides, it turns out that getting fired can be a good sign. A story this week in (oh, sweet irony) the Globe and Mail notes that some of the great figures in history got the sack on their way up. Albert Einstein was unceremoniously fired as a young man.

Thomas Edison was too. Henry Ford got the hook. Even late-night yapper David Letterman and diminutive sex guru-ess Ruth Westheimer each got pink slips before they got famous.

Makes sense when you think about it. You can't put a size ten foot in a size eight shoe. People who are unhappy in their work are going to do a lousy job.

And bosses are always on the lookout for people doing lousy jobs.

In the selling game, lousy performance shows up pretty quickly. I also remember now how my colleagues, the other salesmen, lived in dread of "the monthly roundup."

That's when the sales manager toted up all the advertising space that had been sold, and by whom, and handed out congratulations to the hotshots.

And a private closed-door, one-on-one "chat" to the also-rans. Nobody wanted one of those "chats."

I still remember one morning in the coffee shop, six or seven of us sitting around waiting to start the day of "making calls." The talk turned, as it often did, to What I'll Do When I Win The Lottery.

Ronnie, one of the quieter ones, surprised us all by saying "The day after I win the lottery, I'm coming down to the office and I'm gonna pee all over the sales manager's desk."

Everybody laughed.

Everybody except Danny. "Not me," said Danny. "I plan to hire someone to do it for me."

Reader seeks prolific ostrich

Dear Editor,

Forget the chickens, set free the cattle, I want one of those ostriches.

Each one "lays about 30-60 large, cream-coloured eggs every second day between April and September," according to your correspondent on the Food & Drink page in the Sept. 16 edition.

I'd even be happy with the less prolific emu, who lays a mere "20-40 dark green eggs every third day between November and April."

If each ostrich egg is equivalent to 22 chicken eggs, I figure (with help from my calculator) that the average weekly output of an ostrich is equal to that of almost three thousand chickens!

Where can I get one, and can we raise them here in our back yards? Yeah, I know this is silly, but hey, I guess it proves that I read the whole paper.

Matt Douris
Stouffville

LETTERS

Editor's Note: Some confusion may have resulted in the interpretation of the Sept. 16 article on ostriches.

In fact, ostriches lay a total of between 30-60 eggs over the entire season ranging from April to September. The same holds true for the emu which lays a total of between 20-40 eggs for the season ranging from November to April. The ostrich lays approximately one egg every two days, while the emu lays one egg approximately every three days.

We apologize for any misunderstanding, and hope local ostrich breeders have not been overrun by eager buyers yearning to eat eggs.

STOUFFVILLE
TRIBUNE
WEEKENDER

A Metroland Community
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The Stouffville Tribune, published every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distribution group of community newspapers which includes Ajax Printing News, Advertiser, Allison Herald Courier, Harris Advertiser, Hamilton Guardian, Burlington Post, Caledonia Collingwood/Waaka Beach Connection, East York Mirror, Etobicoke Guardian, Georgetown Independent/Aston Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Markham Tomorrow, Sun Hilland/Georgetown Mirror, Milton Guardian, Oakville Mirror, Simcoe News, Newmarket/Aurora Era Banner, Northumberland News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Orillia Today, Oshawa/Whitby-Carrington/Park Perry This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill/Thornhill/Vaughan Mirror, Scarborough Mirror, and Windsor Tribune. Today's Senior Contents cannot be reprinted without written permission from the publisher. Permit #1247. The publisher reserves the right to refuse or classify an advertisement. Credits for advertisement limited to space the error occupied.



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