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Export date: Fri Mar 29 2:13:01 2024 / +0000 GMT

POLITICS AS USUAL: Truth & Consequences

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Poor Rob Ford has resumed his albeit limited duties as Mayor of Toronto for only a week and things have gone south rather quickly.

From his sobriety coach's alleged swift kick to the rear of a protestor, to Mayor Ford's odd refusal to join a standing ovation in the Council chambers, it's been a bad week by even Ford standards. Story after story of disastrous outings, ill-advised pronouncements and just plain head-scratchingly stupid behaviour. Not sure what he learned in rehab, but it certainly wasn't media relations?
However, before we revel in our collective sense of schadenfraude ? yet again ? we should remember that he is still the Mayor of Canada's largest city. And the Office of Mayor ? if not the person ? does at least deserve some respect. Yes, Ford is still Ford and while he does bring the bulk of the problems on himself, some of the press's fixations truly do go beyond the pale.
The press seem hell-bent on going after Ford regardless of the cost. And the cost of breaching the confidentiality of Ford's rehab experience will be significant ? for current and future patients of Greenstone, or any treatment facility for that matter, certainly if one is ?famous? or infamous as the case may be.
The success of rehab, AA, or psychological support for addictions of any kind is predicated on absolute confidentiality of all involved. All of the aforementioned mental health support systems require the patient to be as vulnerable as possible so as to get to the very root of the issues that are driving their addictions or self-harming behaviours.
Patients reveal their most private thoughts, deepest fears, and painful memories secure in the knowledge that all will be held confidential.
It is thus a shocking betrayal of trust to reveal any of the confidences of the patients. And it can cause real harm as a result.
If you cannot trust that the nursing assistant that hands you your methadone, or the fellow addict who sits across from you in group therapy or the cook who slips you that extra piece of bacon will keep their mouths shut about what transpires within the walls of the facility, then how can you possibly hope to get better?
The folks in rehab are there for a reason. They have hurt a lot of people, themselves included with their addictions. Chances are they have hit rock bottom, or close to it, and desperately need help.
How does it help their recovery to read stories about themselves at their most vulnerable splashed across the front page of national dailies? So what if they are true (and there's no proof that the stories are true). What do they prove? That Ford was difficult in therapy? Of course he was. He's a difficult personality when drunk, can you imagine what he'd be like when drying out? It's not a surprise.
Confronting difficult truths are part of the therapy, part of the process for every addict. That patients can be difficult ? violent even ? during that process should not be a judgement against them.
But that is what this is all about. Judgment. How fast we hold to a Puritanical past.
Ford was urged to ?get help.? And so he did. Yes, rather belatedly, but he did go through the process. Whether he committed to that process or not, however, is not for us to judge. Only Ford knows. And only Ford will benefit or suffer as the case may be.
If there is a collective interest in Ford getting the help and support he truly needs ? as so many of his council colleagues and fellow candidates so unctuously pronounce ? then on this one thing I say, for the love of God, leave the man alone.
Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.