

BROCK'S BANTER: Fighting the close of a chapter

By Brock Weir

It's an uncomfortable feeling, but sometimes you have very little choice. That is, looking beyond the individual to see promise in the big picture.

Every so often, you are confronted with a good idea that can solve a particularly sticky problem when you realise an even stickier situation: you don't particularly hold the person who has had an unexpectedly brilliant brainstorm in the highest esteem.

You're at that inevitable fork in the road; do you decide to go your own way out of sheer spite, or swallow a bit of pride and follow the most obvious course of path, albeit a path laid down by the unlikeliest of suspects?

We all learn this lesson from a very early age.

I'm sure all of us have memories of being youngsters throwing up our hands in frustration at a vexing situation. Perhaps it came about during an argument with a parent where each party dug in their respective heels, sure in the conviction that only they were right. Voices were likely raised, things leading to near-immediate regret were likely said and, more likely than not, neutral corners were sought. Once there, as you cooled off, you might realise there was a smidgen of validity in what your sparring partner happened to be saying.

It's always a galling feeling, but when it happened, you just had to forge ahead and deal.

You got used to it as you were growing up. It extended outside the home to school when you were confronted with some contrary ideas from teachers. Now, many of us are confronted with this inconvenient reality in the workplace or the public realm.

I'm sure many, if not all of you have been in situations where you don't necessarily see eye-to-eye with a co-worker, project partner, or fellow volunteer. You might regularly roll your eyes at some of their statements, their approach to doing things, how they play well with others ? and are absolutely gobsmacked when they have a singular moment of clarity that forces you to begrudgingly acquiesce to their suggestion.

Personally, I don't care for that feeling, as a rule, but when it happens you just have to roll with it. If only more people would do the same.

I was thinking about this over the weekend as I watched coverage of the death of U.S. Senator John McCain.

In the end, he is being lionized ? and rightfully so ? as a man who went above and beyond giving back to his country. Whether you liked the man or not, it's a claim that is hard to deny.

He answered the call to serve in Vietnam, being held Prisoner of War, and living each day of the rest of his life with the after-effects of his experience, mental and physical. He overcame these obstacles to serve tirelessly in Washington for decades. His multiple stabs at the presidency may have garnered him almost equal numbers of new supporters and detractors, but few could say that he was entering the fray for self-aggrandizement, riches and power.

Of course, those are all side-benefits to the top job, but it was clear he was in it because he had a vision for his country and believed he was the right man for the job.

?John McCain and I were members of different generations, came from completely different backgrounds, and competed at the highest level of politics,? said Barack Obama in a statement over the weekend. ?But we shared, for all our differences, a fidelity to something higher: the ideals for which generations of Americans and immigrants alike have fought, marched and sacrificed.

?We saw our political battles, even, as a privilege, something noble, an opportunity to serve as stewards of those high ideals at home, and to advance them around the world. We saw this country as a place where anything is possible ? and citizenship as our patriotic obligation to ensure it forever remains that way.

?Few of us have been tested the way John once was, or required to show the kind of courage that he did. But all of us can aspire to the courage to put the greater good above our own. At John's best, he showed us what that means. And, for that, we're all in his debt.?

George W. Bush was briefer in his sentiments but no less warm.

?Some lives are so vivid, it is difficult to imagine them ended,? he said. ?Some voices are so vibrant, it is hard to think of them stilled. John McCain was a man of deep conviction and a patriot of the highest order. He was a public servant in the finest traditions of our country. And, to me, he was a friend whom I'll deeply miss.?

In the end, I think the factors of ?deep conviction? and ?public servant? the two most salient points in these respective eulogies as they are becoming increasingly rare commodities.

John McCain took his share of flack over the years, often with good reason, but he always struck me as a man with a passion to

serve, a passion for doing the right thing, and a passion to do his utmost to make his vision a reality.

He had a base, but he didn't pander to it. He set out his policy within the confines of general party principles, but he didn't sway in the breeze and bend in feeble attempts at vote-getting. He didn't sully his own principles, put his dignity on the auction block, or otherwise debase himself in order to boost his poll numbers. He didn't tell people what they wanted to hear; he spoke what was on his mind and, in some cases, said what people needed to hear.

In his last act, he was one of the most vocal detractors in the direction his country was going in. Generally, although not uniformly, he was one of the few people in his party to be a voice of reason and a voice for the principles his country used to hold so dear.

What a way to go out with one's head held high.

While his death was a release from long illness, it is always sad when a chapter like this closes. This time, however, it seemed like the close of a chapter on basic civility, conviction, bipartisanship, and flexing alarmingly atrophied muscles in seeing the other side of an argument. I can only hope this is not truly the case.