

BROCK'S BANTER: The road to hell is paved with snowballs

By Brock Weir

We're taught fairly early on in life that there is no such thing as a dumb question.

It's drilled into us as early as elementary school, when our teachers urge us to eagerly raise our hands for all and sundry things. I have a theory that it is something that is drilled equally enthusiastically into teachers as well because, let's face it, sometimes you can just tell they're encouraging participation outside their own better judgement.

While the perception that there are no dumb questions is something we come to accept from this early indoctrination, time has other ideas. As we progress through Grade 12, and head off to college, university or the trades, we like to think we develop a sixth sense for such things. You can smell a 'dumb' question coming a mile away and it is something we apparently choose to accept and move on with our day.

But the tides turn again. As we assume positions of responsibility - whether in the home or in the workplace - we're right back again where we started, fostering the notion, now redoubled in our conviction, that there are indeed no 'dumb' questions.

Sure, some day to day questions are occasionally greeted with an involuntary reaction that can be chalked up simply to exasperation. (See: Eye, Rolled; Eyebrow, Cocked; Sigh, Dramatic) but there is always a kernel of merit there, and exploring the answer can be a learning experience for all parties concerned.

But, the reality is, as we work our way through life - life, in this case, being that state of being mysteriously described by people of privilege as 'the real world' - we find there are occasionally questions that are best left unasked.

There is that old adage that it is best to keep your mouth closed and let people think you're a fool then to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

That is not what I am talking about here. This is more of an 'if you want something done, ask a busy person to do it' situation.

At the end of the day, we are all very busy people in our own way. I am sure you understand that if you're going a mile a minute with the task at hand, ideas bubble over at just about the same pace.

What do you do with them?

Well, you have one of two options: put those particular thoughts into the world, or just keep them to yourself.

This is a Choose Your Own Adventure moment.

If you follow Option B, keeping them to yourself, you can keep plugging away, working away at them here and there as time allows. Kind of pedestrian.

Option A, throwing it all out there, offers far more intriguing possibilities.

Putting voice to a particular question or opinion might direct them to the ear of a person that could affect the change you want to see in the world. On the other hand, if it reaches the wrong ear, you're likely to get an inevitable response that boils down to, 'That's a great idea, let me know how it turns out,' and your already full plate is suddenly spilling onto the table.

But there is also a third prong in this fork in the road: your idea landing in the wrong hands, or, worse, too many hands, and, as a result, snowballing and growing into an unwieldy behemoth that bears little resemblance to your original idea.

We see this often in the civic and public realms where a well-intentioned brainstorm takes a turn and what seemed like a simple idea at the outset spirals out of control and devolves into a debacle involving thousands upon thousands of taxpayer dollars, endless staff time, reams of reports reiterating what is found in the last, and an inordinate amount of time spent on soliciting public input all for naught.

It would be a waste of column inches to compile a complete list of all the examples of this that have unfolded over the last four, eight, twelve years, so let's keep things current with two simple words: Library Square.

But, there is a more recent example.

Last month, Aurora Council dived into the unexpectedly heady area of civil marriage.

Their debate was not about civil marriage itself - that is, of course, a done deal - but where these marriages should be held.

Since Council approved civil marriages being performed in Town Hall, most ceremonies have taken place in chic and glamorous Council Chambers.

Earlier this year, however, Councillor Mrakas had an interesting idea to gussy up the underused Petch House - that is, go all out and give the place some of that newfangled electricity - so it could be used as another possible wedding venue and bring some money into municipal coffers.

A simple enough idea, right?

Well, we're both wrong.

By the time the feasibility report on the very idea came back to Council with an estimate on the dollars and cents required to make it happen, suddenly it became a very complicated matter indeed.

A suggestion to wire the place for electricity somehow snowballed into suggestions of a fully realised investigation on foregoing the \$35,000 investment to power up into looking into the possibility of taking the building off its four-year-old foundations behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre and hauling it off to a new location to be determined, at a cost that is also to be determined.

Before the log cabin was moved to its new location, it spent the better part of a decade mouldering away on a platform on Leslie Street, providing luxurious accommodation for generations of raccoons, many of whom went to their great reward within its walls. Few saw any possibilities in a pile of logs marinated in damp and rodent waste, but others were able to scratch away at the rank surface to see the potential.

Discussions certainly weren't scant; no shortage of suggestions were brought forward on what to do with the building ? everything ranging from storage, to a gift shop, to a tourism centre ? and not one of these ideas has yet been implemented.

Now, there's talk about scrapping the thing entirely, rebuilding it elsewhere, and starting the whole process to see what might be able to fly next.

All this from a simple question on opening up the possibilities.

Perhaps it would be worth earnestly exploring the options put forward by the citizens instead of washing our collective hands of it.