

BROCK'S BANTER: 'Cause you've got personality

By Brock Weir

John Steinbeck is quoted as writing, 'Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen.'

Perhaps, as far as ideas go, it is a bit simplistic, but, when you pare it down to its core, it is a fundamental truth.

But learning how to handle them is the tough part, and it is fast becoming a lost art. It's not that I would ever presume to have mastered that art, but I've had a few good ideas from time to time; ideas that were valued, sometimes pooh-poohed because they were a bit unusual or, worse still, 'just not the way things are done.' More often than not, however, there were kudos to go around simply for speaking up and throwing an idea on the table, regardless of whether it ultimately gained traction.

In recent years, it seems that these values seem to be going by the wayside in the grand scheme of things. In the wider world, there was a trend that it wasn't enough to have and foster an idea 'but, let's face it, there was never a time when that alone was enough ' but rather who is presenting said idea.

Over the last year though it seems this trend is going further adrift and ideas are sadly becoming less and less important compared to the weight given to the presenter.

I remember back in the good old days of, say, ten years ago, where the world was very much a different place. Sure, scandals of varying magnitude could make or break a person, a campaign, or a political party but, more often than not, dialogue leading up to the scandal du jour was peppered with ideas, vision, and a particular philosophy.

These ideas, visions, and individual philosophies set out a clear course, a menu, if you will, of what each person, each party was offering a potential voter. Amid the swampy rhetoric was a vision to be had, a vision that was more or less easily digestible and, depending on which colour you happened to bleed, ready to be consumed by the masses.

Nowadays, thanks to the political machinations in the United States and, in some cases closer to home, such as the Trudeaumania echo, it is becoming increasingly centred on the person, the personality, rather than what they and their team ultimately represent to the people.

Writing this on Sunday afternoon, I am casting my mind back to this time exactly one week ago, before a tidal wave washed out of the ballroom of the Beverley Hills Hotel. At that time, I was writing about the options we have to 'keep house' with just a few months away from two very important elections.

Then, just a little while later, a potential game-changer.

'We know that press is under siege these days,' said the speechmaker. 'We also know it's the insatiable dedication to uncovering the absolute truth that keeps us from turning a blind eye to corruption and to injustice. To tyrants, and victims, and secrets and lies. I want to say that I value the press more than ever before as we try to navigate these complicated times. What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.'

With that, the speechmaker touched upon racism and sexism in her particular sector, particularly women who have spoken up about sexual harassment in the entertainment industry, and, really all industry; of the fight for Civil Rights in the United States, and ultimately the ticking clock racing each of these forms of hatred and abuse.

'In my career, what I've always tried my best to do, whether on television or through film, is to say something about how men and women really behave,' concluded Oprah Winfrey as she accepted the Cecil B. DeMille Award for lifetime achievement at the Golden Globe Awards. 'To say how we experience shame, how we love, how we rage, how we fail, how we retreat, persevere, and how we overcome.'

'I've interviewed and portrayed people who've withstood some of the ugliest things life can throw at you, but the one quality all of them seem to share is the ability to maintain hope for a brighter morning, even during our darkest nights. So, I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon. And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women, many of whom are right here in this room tonight, and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say, 'Me too' again.'

And, with that, a contender for the 2020 U.S. Presidential election was born.

Oprah's words represent, I believe, universal ideals and something all people with even the slightest semblance of humanity can subscribe to, but they are all ideas that have been voiced before and, until they are the norm, will continue to be voiced until something has been achieved.

But what is it about Oprah's words that turned a simple speech, albeit a powerful and moving speech, into something which has

sparked a movement?

That, in the end, might be the most complex ? and yet, at the same time, simplest ? part of the conversation.

With the ongoing onslaught against the most basic norms of humanity, Oprah's words obviously struck a chord with a wide cross-section of people around the world.

They tapped into a hunger and thirst for passion and normalcy that has been sadly starved since November 2016.

But what of the words themselves? Obviously much of the sentiment in the speech reflected not only ongoing political tensions in the United States but also turmoil within an industry that has been long-festering, only to recently burst to begin what will undoubtedly be a very long healing process ? but they are sentiments not altogether different from those offered in recent years by Secretary Clinton, Senator Sanders, and countless others determined to find themselves on the right side of history.

The difference? Personality.

For over two decades, Oprah Winfrey held court on television, amassing an unprecedented following that transcended racial, gender and income barriers, offering both an outlet for people to share their stories and an avenue to find inspiration and, some would argue, salvation. It is a flock she has continued to shepherd after her retirement from daily television with an increased emphasis on film and the written word, but it is as strong as ever.

It's not unlike the audience the current occupant of the White House has fostered through a potent combination of entertainment, grandiloquence, and offering an outlet for people to share their worst qualities.

Nobody can deny the events of November 2016 were a cataclysmic game changer, but as they have altered, and continue to alter, world events, perhaps it has changed the very playing field politics is fought on.

Donald Trump's ultimate success is sweeping into power in a never-before-seen cult of personality.

It might be our new reality that the only way to fight a personality cult is with another personality cult.

And, although ideas seem like they are sadly becoming less and less important, I for one would sleep better knowing Oprah's finger is on the button.