

Urban Putty

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“Too polite to evoke hard realities”

William Johnson, in a recent Globe and Mail column outlining Quebec Premier Landry's bellicose attitudes on the Romanov Report, directed against the “feds”, has a far larger ring, to be restricted to the field of federal/provincial relations. Johnson is referring to English Canada's being “too polite to evoke hard realities,” as a contributor, albeit silent, to Landry's unchallenged freedom to dream.

English Canada is, and has always been, far “too polite to evoke hard realities” whether those realities are national and political, or domestic and personal. A mother of a young adult daughter, who found her phone card with \$25 unexplained charges which SHE had not made, does not have a conversation with the daughter in question, but indirectly reprimands the “offending” daughter by telling her older sister of the misdemeanour.

How many passive-aggressives have each of us known, whose silence covered a minefield of anger, only to have it become volcanic when we least expected?

How many times have we all been in conversations in which someone was “slammed” while the understanding was that such comments were to be protected from disclosure?

If George W. Bush is prepared to speak so publicly about the “axis of evil”, we can just imagine what kind of words

must be bouncing off the walls in the Oval Office, where he is protected.

The Canadian government is quick to create a gun registry (with ballooning costs over \$1 billion), while it votes to approve the Kyoto protocol without offering an implementation strategy. Perhaps we can be grateful that no estimate of costs is less dishonest than to so blindly underestimate, as they have done on the gun registry, while apparently deliberately refusing to inform Parliament.

English Canadians, it seems, are not “too polite to evoke hard realities” about overspending! In fact, they seemed incensed. About relationships between English and French, however, and particularly when the discussion is focussed on Quebec, there is what looks like a self-imposed “English Canadian tongue-tying” in the politically correct mode.

A similar phenomenon has been documented in the Canadian military, where no English-speaking personnel will acknowledge any animosity against their French-speaking colleagues, while the “under-the-table” racism continues in local humour.

On the other side, we have all met French-speaking Canadians whose contempt for the English is never provable or demonstrable while the truth of their attitudes is palpable.

Have we really created a model of what Margaret Atwood once called, “the dialogue of the deaf” on this issue? Anger, focused and directed, from many sources, does reach its target.

In our southern neighbour, I may find the comments made in public obnoxious, if not hateful, but given the Americans' honouring to a fault their "freedom of speech", there is much less acceptance of the politically correct politeness which Johnson derides.

In the workplace, we watch as employees work for individuals whose abuse of their power and status seems unacceptable, while the employees remain silent, "because I need this job." That is a form of "polite" which can only be generated by the need for income to feed and clothe a young family.

Corporations, presumably around the world, have demonstrated a level of cronyism which has often rendered true merit irrelevant, while thousands of workers merely accepted this as "part of doing business." Johnson could, and likely would, call such behavior "too polite to evoke the hard realities." CEOs now earn, on average, \$500 for every \$1 earned by their employees, a dramatic change from the \$43 they earned in the 1970s. There is no evidence and no legitimate argument to justify such excessive greed. Nevertheless, there is no outcry in protest.

The corporate mind-set has morphed into what some have been calling corporatism, a kind of nefarious ideology which is manifest in the "brass ring" many of our brightest and best minds seek to grasp, to their sad regret. A model through which to view this tragic drama might be the radio and television industry. There are literally thousands of aspiring news anchors making a meagre wage in the small markets, while three or four people make

millions anchoring the network desks each evening. The ego has often an insatiable appetite, and there is no shortage of aspirants for that handful of anchor chairs.

Has anyone dared to connect the dots between the dramatic increase in bullying in the schoolyards of North America, at the same time the U.S. government struts its military muscle in every corner of the globe? The Nobel Peace Prize for 2002 has been awarded to former President Jimmy Carter in one of the greatest ironies of history as his own country teeters on the brink of war. Not wanting to fall into the Johnson trap, "too polite to evoke hard realities," let's look at some more obvious examples of absurdities.

Business leaders are quick and eager to jump on any plane for any seminar under the sun in a faraway place, while they ironically refuse to spend \$35.00 and a dozen hours **reading anything** that might fertilize their minds; then they brag about how the last book they read was Harry Potter to their young child.

Relationships implode on trip-wires of such miniscule consequence that it seems impossible to imagine what might happen in the face of a real problem so monstrous is the collective loss of perspective and common sense. How to respond to such absurdities? No one really knows!

Peace making is not the same thing as appeasement; the confusion is rampant. Political correctness is not the cornerstone of integrity, but often the antithesis of it.

In the discussions in our families and workplaces, we can model effective, respectful disagreement without incarnating the abuse of power.

If you are offended, find a polite, but direct approach to advocate for yourself, without creating additional offense. If you find another who isn't instantly victimized by your redress, call a newspaper, or a radio station, or paint a sign - celebrating the victory, for us all! "Too nice to evoke hard realities" is a moniker for the spineless; English Canadians do not need to qualify easily or willingly.

If you have a story that demonstrates how you drew the line against being too polite and succeeded in receiving the respect you deserved, drop us a note: **theacorncentre.com**