

Changing policy; honey and vinegar

Bancroft, I think it might be time to take a deep breath and regroup.

Over the last two weeks local concerns about hydro have really gained momentum. Energy poverty, the 60,000 disconnects, necessity versus want and basic human rights policy has all come front and centre. We're asking the right questions, we're shining a light on a situation that needs to be addressed and soon ? but we have to remember to be respectful.

At the rally for gnomes of social justice and equality, yelling 'shame?' and pounding a war beat in an expression of utter frustration was the right place, right time. Yelling it at the ombudsman meeting, to a woman who came to advocate on your behalf? Not the right time, or place.

Don't get me wrong; I believe in the right to protest, but I also believe in being gracious. Some will say being polite doesn't work ? that's absolutely true ? but there is a fine line between yelling at someone to feel better and using inflection to nail home a fact, or better: a solution.

The closer the community voice gets to the energy minister ? the closer it gets to any kind of solution ? the more honey will work than vinegar.

Some might say I don't know what you're going through. I'll admit my situation is not dire. While my hydro bill is outrageous, I can't imagine how hard it must be to be forced to choose between feeding your family or heating your home. But let me put it this way. Yelling, talking over someone, swearing, demanding ? not that all of these things were done, but they fit in the same category ? weakens your argument. Fiona Crean said over and over again that she couldn't deal with policy, that she could only deal with individual complaints, and still people took to the microphone to heckle her. I wrote an article stating that was what she was attending for and still those who came were there to shake their heads or use the meeting to further other agendas.

I didn't want to cover the ombudsman meeting after leaving. It was not a success story. A lot of time was wasted on hot air. I want to follow up with the woman with the \$4,000 bill and the man who can't get his hydro pole fixed because it's on private property ? but the meeting was hijacked. My story could have been shining a light on those individuals, helping them getting ahead, holding Crean accountable for any promises she made them ? instead, the angle focused again on the anger of community members because that was the voice of the majority.

It seems to me what's happening right now is there are two groups wanting to make change for locals in regards to hydro: both want to help locals. Unfortunately, over the course of the last few weeks both groups knocked heads and couldn't come to an agreement. There are two groups working towards the same goal, expending the same energy, exhausting themselves against a beast larger than them, but not working together. It's because they have a different way of doing things. Both have strengths, both have weaknesses. One's more honey, the other more vinegar. We need both.

Everyone had a right to be at the ombudsman meeting, including both groups. I commend the gnomes for taking their protest outside, and for inviting community members to sign their letter to the energy minister. The problem was that the rallying cry came inside. I don't think that was anyone's intention or fault, or maybe it was, but it was energy expended in the wrong direction.

This town is taking its problem to the government's front door, of that I have no doubt. A lot of attention is going to come with that. Please, leave room for each story to be different ? inspire coverage over and over and over again. Use honey, use vinegar, switch it up, backwards, forwards but don't get lost along the way.