



Question

Honest politician doesn't have to be oxymoron

Editorial

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There are times in everyone's lives when difficult conversations must be had, and decisions made about how much information to share and exactly how honest to be.

Information sharing in the Facebook/Twitter age makes it that much harder to keep secrets, and add a small town like Whistler to the mix and things get even more personal and public. With privacy seemingly under constant attack, how is one to navigate the minefield of public perception?

For politicians at any level of government and anyone in a high-profile position, there first must be a recognition and acceptance that your life will be under a certain degree of scrutiny — and there may be people actively searching for skeletons in your closet. If employers are increasingly scouring job candidates' Facebook pages and other online activity for untoward behaviour, you can bet anyone in the public eye will be examined that much more. So if there's a good chance of being "found out," what's the game plan? Turns out that your grandmother was right — honesty really is the best policy.

It's always been the case, but the point is even more important in the information age. Operating with integrity — in all areas of life — is pretty much the only foolproof strategy for surviving a trial by public opinion. People still might not like you or what you've done, but any accusations of conspiracy, lies or cover-ups just won't stick.

From what we've seen so far, it seems Mayor Nancy Wilhelm-Morden is taking this approach to her new role — and modeling an attitude of honesty and transparency to the rest of the council team and municipal staffers to boot.

In addition to speaking honestly to constituents one-on-one, Mayor Nancy is inviting feedback and conversation on Facebook, making efforts to sharing muni news openly and in a timely fashion and making herself as available as possible to members of the media and concerned community members.

She was very candid in a recent public talk to a group of local women, sharing some of her challenges since stepping into the mayor's role. She also made no bones this week about the difficulty council had in coming to the decision not to appeal the asphalt ruling.

It's a breath of fresh air to hear a local official talking in plain language, being as honest as possible and taking a decidedly no-B.S. approach to sharing information.

From a media standpoint, it seems all too often in Whistler people are afraid to say anything on the record or — gasp! — share their opinions in print. Sure, it's prudent to be careful and think before you put something on the public record, but when did we all get so scared?

There are a couple of other examples of great local communicators who should serve as role models for the rest of us. Any reporter who has ever interviewed Whistler Blackcomb's Doug Forseth will tell you he's got it nailed with his direct, honest approach and ability to share as much as possible without overstepping company boundaries. And Mo Douglas, the trustworthy, local face of the Olympics, understands the power of telling the truth. She's bang-on in a couple of recent blog postings about why the public is so skeptical and attuned to spin.

Sure, it's sometimes scary to be honest. As Mo writes, telling the truth can make us vulnerable. But more and more, that's becoming the only way to earn the public's trust and respect.

We hope council will continue in the positive direction, and keep spreading the honesty gospel to others in Whistler.

- Jennifer Miller