

FOR PETE'S SAKE

By Dawn Chafe



“Pete” is not pleased with me. Actually, “a little peed-off” is how he put it in his email (his tone hinted that he was “a lot peed-off”). He didn’t want me to print his comments, which is why you won’t find his full remarks printed in Chatterbox. It’s also why I’m not using his real name. I am, however, paraphrasing his comments (and quoting them judiciously) to find out if Pete is an outlier—or not.

According to Pete, our March entrepreneurship issue was guilty of articles with “hints of socially progressive thinking.” He found columnists Eleanor Beaton and Stephen Kimber equally offensive, because of their social and political commentary. For the record, Pete doesn’t think a business magazine should have “provocative” columns.

Pete didn’t identify the specific articles he found upsetting, but I can speculate. It might have been Katie Ingram’s piece on entrepreneurship and how it empowers persons with disabilities and youth at risk, delivering positive returns for the entire community. Perhaps it was Jana Hemphill’s “The Island Way,” about P.E.I. leading Atlantic Canada in business confidence and immigration. Or it could have been “Eastern Edge”: journalist Drew Brown’s interview with Chelsey Paterson, a business consultant with the YMCA of Newfoundland and Labrador, revealed that startups are revitalizing rural communities like Bonavista.

In all three cases (assuming these are the stories Pete was alluding to), he’s right: these stories did report on socially progressive thinking (i.e. how business activity can be both an economic booster and an agent for positive social change). To be honest, I don’t see anything wrong with that.

When we launched our Top 50 CEO awards 19 years ago, we deliberately included elements of corporate social responsibility in the selection criteria. Winning nominees absolutely have to grow their companies and organizations, increase revenue, create employment and be industry leaders. But they also have to show that they donate, corporately and personally, to community causes. After all, these aren’t run-of-the-mill CEOs: they are the Top 50 in Atlantic Canada, and they are uniformly exceptional across all of those criteria.

As influential as we like to think Atlantic Business Magazine’s Top 50 CEO awards are, even we aren’t so naïve as to think that hundreds of CEOs across the region have suddenly started volunteering and donating millions of dollars to charity just so they can win an award. The reason we put that criteria in place was because we had observed how important

community service is to Atlantic Canada’s businesses. But don’t take my word for it: check out the story on page 128 where Top 50 CEOs past and present explain, in their own words, why it’s important for them to give back.

With regards to the columns, Eleanor’s “Open letter to taller than average white men” touched on the challenges faced by women trying to advance in their careers—and offered tips on how their traditionally gender-advantaged counterparts could help them move up the ladder. Stephen Kimber’s pungently titled column (“If it smells like manure...”) ranted about the toxic combination of fake news and a gullible populace.

Were these columns of a social and political nature? Somewhat to the first, and yes to the second. Were they deliberately designed to goad readers into thinking about these issues? Absolutely. That’s what great columnists do—and Eleanor and Stephen are two of the best (both of them are finalists for this year’s National Magazine Awards, in the Best Columnist category).

He was right: these stories did show business activity can be both an economic booster and an agent for positive social change. I don’t see anything wrong with that

Personally speaking, I think Eleanor and Stephen produce a level of work that our readers deserve. I also believe our readers are broad-minded enough to appreciate content that occasionally verges outside the parameters of what could be strictly defined as business.

Business doesn’t operate in a vacuum. Why would we separate businesses from the communities in which they live and operate, when the corporate community sees itself as an important part of the social ecosystem? But maybe I’m wrong. What do you think?

Dawn Chafe started with *Atlantic Business Magazine* as a freelancer 22 years ago, becoming editor in 1998.

FEEDBACK

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