

Politically correct speech

By BRIAN LOCKHART

I was going over the federal government's new guidelines for politically correct speech to be used by all of its employees when dealing with the public.

We now seem to have arrived at a place where common sense no longer applies to any government agency.

The new directive now discourages, or more like forbids, the use of such horrifying words as 'mother,' 'father,' 'him,' and 'her,' as well as a whole list of other words that is going to make it very difficult to even order breakfast at the Parliament Hill cafeteria without offending someone.

I believe an order of bacon and eggs with coffee now requires something like 'porcine pieces,' 'fowl auxiliary units,' and a 'circular porcelain drinking unit with plant-based hot beverage.'

The words 'mother and father' are to be replaced by 'parents.' The personal pronouns, 'him and her' are being replaced by 'them or they.'

Sorry, federal government, your guidelines on how to speak to members of the general public border on the absurd and no average member of society is going to follow suit.

I, as well as millions of others, will not refer to their mom or dad as 'parental units.' I refuse to call my mother by a reference that was used as a joke in the Coneheads comedy sketch. At least the writers of that movie meant it as a joke.

Whether the federal government likes to admit it or not, every single person in the government had a mother. Maybe politicians prefer to think of themselves as being hatched from eggs in an incubator like a grade six science experiment.

Proponents of so-called politically correct speech say it is useful as it stops people from offending others.

Well, no, it doesn't. It only makes politically correct people think they are not offending others.

If a person wants to offend you they will. If a person wants to take offence, they will.

The problem with twisting words around is it reduces the impact or true meaning of a word, phrase, or intent. Hiding behind a substitute word just to sound nice, benefits no one.

During the First World War, a new phenomenon was discovered. That war was the first time in history in which troops were subject to long periods of unrelenting battle.

Some soldiers who had been exposed to daily shelling and rifle fire for an extended period of time began to show signs of a nervous disorder.

Some developed a mild case, others were severely impacted by the daily struggle to stay alive and the horrors of daily life in the trenches surrounded by the death and maiming of comrades and friends.

Officials described the condition as being 'shell-shocked.'

'Shocked' being the important word.

The condition manifested itself again during the Second World War. This time around they called it a nicer version of the same thing: battle fatigue.

Except fatigue indicates they were tired. They weren't tired, they were indeed shocked into a condition by a horrific situation.

However, the politically correct military used the new version so it would not really indicate the seriousness of the situation and why men were ending up in the psychiatric wards of a hospital.

The condition of course still exists and we now know it as something completely different, post-traumatic stress.

Not using politically correct speech does not mean you will be insulting to anyone at any time.

If you use the common address 'Sir' while greeting a person, obviously a man in this case, you don't know, there is no reasonable expectation of any normal person being offended.

If by chance you come across a person while working in public life who wishes to be addressed in some other fashion, so be it. It's no big deal to address that person the way they seem fit.

That always reminds me of the Seinfeld episode where the guy always wanted to be addressed as 'Maestro,' even if he was just the conductor of the police auxiliary band.

Yeah, well call him Maestro if that makes him feel better.

When you've got government interfering in common, every day things, such as the way you speak, that is an indicator of more to come.

I would imagine the singing of 'Happy Birthday' to a co-worker on Parliament Hill during a departmental party must be very awkward these days, not to mention singing along to a Muzak version of a Beatles tune in the elevator.

That's something that could get you fired if they play Eleanor Rigby.

On that note, running into a new mom on her first Mother's Day must be a nightmare!