

Communication

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I have always thought that if everyone had spoken the same language, the First World War might have turned out very differently.

If you were in a trench and saw an enemy soldier approaching and yelling, "Nicht schieben. Wir sind unbewaffnet. Wir wollen nicht kämpfen," most likely that soldier would have ended up dead, and rather quickly.

However, if the same soldier approached and in perfect English said, "Don't shoot. We are unarmed. We don't want to fight," that same soldier who would have shot him likely would have eased up on the trigger finger.

Communication is an important tool in life. It allows you to stay in touch with others and share your thoughts.

It can be the difference between life and death in extreme circumstances.

I was working at a large company in Toronto when I went to the cafeteria for a break and a cup of coffee.

A man was holding a piece of paper and speaking to the cafeteria lady.

She saw me and waved me over.

"You're a manager," she said. "This man would like to apply for a job. Can you help him?"

I don't know how the man managed to get to the cafeteria in a rather large secure building, but I offered to help. We sat down at one of the tables, and he showed me the work application.

It was not a complicated document. All you had to do was fill in the required information and hand it in to the HR department.

He was having a real problem figuring out how to complete the document.

It finally occurred to me that the man could not read.

I didn't ask him about that. Instead, I took the pen, read out the questions, and filled in the application for him. He was grateful for the help.

I wondered what struggles this man faced in life if he couldn't even fill out a job application?

Without the ability to read, a newspaper would be useless to him. How would he get a driver's license if he couldn't read and pass the written test?

Even if he did drive, how could he read the street signs to know where he was? He couldn't even appreciate a birthday card if one was given to him.

When I was a kid, I received a radio with a tape deck for my birthday.

This unit was unusual as it was able to pick up shortwave radio. I spent many late nights tuning in to Radio Free Europe and Voice of America just to hear what was being broadcast.

Those stations were designed to counter propaganda put out by countries behind the Iron Curtain.

I always found the news on those stations to be fair, accurate, and honest.

It was fascinating to think that some people in a communist country could tune into these stations and find out what was really happening in the world, rather than believe the lies they were told by their communist governments.

Most people already knew they were being lied to. Especially when the government reports the economy was doing great, yet grocery store shelves were empty, and finding necessities like a pair of shoes was a major challenge.

The way people communicate will have a major impact on their lives.

In Afghanistan, possibly the most backward country on the planet, the government, if you can call it that, has pretty much shut the doors of education to all females.

Depending on where they live, some girls can go to school ? but only until around Grade 5. After that, they cannot continue their education.

Even then, education in an Afghan school is mostly religious indoctrination.

There is an entire generation of girls who will be barely literate, if at all, and have no knowledge of real history, math, geography, or language. They will not be able to aspire to have any kind of meaningful career.

They will not be able to communicate effectively.

There have been interviews with some of the girls, who spoke out, albeit nervously, because they knew it could mean trouble for them.

They are a generation that wants to attend secondary school and university, but now sees nothing but a black cloud hanging over their future.

Where is the outrage? International human rights groups have been very quiet about this situation.

In North America, if a prominent person uses a politically incorrect word ? a single word ? it makes headlines.

Yet an entire generation is being denied what should be a human right, and no groups are even addressing the situation.