

The Boy Scout Motto

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It may be the most well-known motto on the entire continent: Be Prepared. Its declaration is easily understood and hardly questionable, although some folks will argue that realistically we can't be prepared for everything that may happen at any given moment. However, to argue that is to misunderstand what the motto really means. It is not about predicting what is coming. It is about being mentally and physically prepared to adapt to what may come. There is a big difference between those two perspectives.

If you take the words literally, then you should have the tool you will need in your pocket exactly when you need it. But you certainly can't always know what tool you will need every time, and you simply can't carry around every tool all the time. No one has pockets that big. What the motto actually means is that you should be in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty. In fact, that is the explanation of the motto presented by the founder of the Boy Scouts, Robert Baden-Powell.

So, "Be Prepared" is about having a state of mind that adapts to changing circumstances, while never losing focus on the cause. But why write about this? I write this column to push communities to be better. This is an important topic because most of our communities are not prepared for anything. Our communities are the foundation on which we build a strong nation. Healthy and prosperous communities mean a vibrant nation where businesses thrive, leadership succeeds, and families can take care of themselves, and each other. A community unprepared is a community at risk, and that puts the strength of the nation at risk.

When we think about communities being prepared, we often think about natural disasters. We have experienced a significant share of those in recent years. Fires, floods, tornados, droughts, and hurricanes have ravaged some of our communities. Yet, while so many others worry if those communities will ever bounce back, our spirits rise, and our communities come together to support and rebuild themselves, and each other. There is no mistaking the power of people to band together to overcome great challenges and crises. When disaster strikes swiftly, we respond swiftly.

The challenge to communities comes when disaster comes at us slowly. There is an old parable about how a frog placed in boiling water will immediately jump out, but a frog placed in cool water that is heated very slowly will remain there until it boils to death. Whether that really happens or not is a question for science, but it serves as a great metaphor for our collective reaction to a disaster. When a powerful disaster strikes quickly, we rally, but when a slow disaster comes at us, we often don't react at all. We sit, much like that frog, unaware our inaction spells our doom.

Slow disasters are not typically natural disasters. They are most often man-made disasters. They occur when we fail to see, or deliberately ignore, the perilousness of our situation over the course of many years. Think of all the communities that rely on one industry to drive their economy. We have all seen the writing on the wall for some of those one-industry communities for some time. The coal and automobile industries are not hiring more people to work, or becoming more labour intensive. Yet, even as the industry changes, or wanes, and the heat turns up, we fail to jump to action and out of hot water.

We need to be better prepared. We need to ensure we, and our community leaders, are mentally and physically prepared to adapt to what may come. After all, that is our duty as citizens and community leaders. We don't have to predict everything that may happen, or always have the right tool handy to fix a problem, but we should be aware of our current circumstance and adapt to the future. If you want to ensure your community is robust and resilient, and has a chance in a rapidly changing world, you need to "Be Prepared" or risk being oblivious to the pot in which you boil.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.