

Respectful communication key to message

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By Jennifer Stone

I'm not necessarily always a believer in the old "you catch more bees with honey" adage.

I do think that, sometimes, you need to be firm.

But being firm doesn't equate to being combative and disrespectful and that's something some of the people working to stop the construction of an incinerator -- or, as the Region says, Energy From Waste facility -- in Clarington could learn.

It's not all of them. Some, the majority in fact, bring polite, informed, well-intentioned messages to council and present them well, politely disagreeing with some and often, all, of the information put forth by politicians and Regional staffers.

But for a small few, the tone of the argument is beginning to impact the credibility of the message.

Some weren't so credible to begin with. Some have brought misinformation or information that is extraneous to the process to the last many meetings of Clarington and regional committees and council. Some choose to shoot the messenger instead of appropriately channelling their frustrations. Many have simply trotted out the same information over and over again, seemingly believing it couldn't be possible council has heard them and still hasn't declared Clarington an unwilling host.

The July 30 council meeting, when many fumed over a decision to not include information from Clarington's peer review of the Environmental Assessment to date, was case in point.

There were some who politely but firmly expressed disappointment and even anger. At the same time, there were those who made allegations of dishonesty and chose, instead of using their time constructively, to simply take potshots at politicians. The frustration is understandable; the tactics are not.

Some would argue this is democracy in action. I contend it's actually derailing democracy for some, who, left to wait till after the same group of people says the same thing over and over again, are simply unable to wait around to see council at work. Take the June 25 council meeting. It was midnight when delegations concluded. For most, that meant being unable to see council make decisions on the rest of the agenda, simply due to the late hour.

I still haven't determined where I stand on incineration. Frankly, I, too, was looking forward to the results of Clarington's peer review. I'd love to have seen it at the last council meeting, when it was supposed to be available. But it wasn't. So at this point, I continue to withhold judgment.

The passion some of those fighting the proposed project have displayed is admirable. The research done by many is credible. But when the argument devolves into potshots and name-calling, the credibility can easily be lost.

Reporter Jennifer Stone's column appears every other Wednesday. E-mail jstone@durhamregion.com