

10-20-17 All Kinds

Municipal employees who have contact with the public, well, we meet all kinds. Mostly, it is a positive experience of meeting a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds, with a variety of needs. Mostly, we get to help people. That is our job, after all.

Then there are the others. How about the guy who told me he had no idea people were living in his shed? That's right; he had no idea. He said this as we both panned the view of the back yard, left to right, at the orange extension cord running from under his kitchen door, across the deck and into the shed. He had no idea!

Then, there are the legal representatives who attempt to bully and intimidate, telling us that we are harassing them when we do our job. Good try. That doesn't work. The Board of Health is obligated to enforce codes and regulations. Obligated.

We meet all kinds of people in all kinds of ways. Some years ago, when people were complaining about a cesspool overflowing into a pond, I was given instructions for how I might view the problem. I had tried to see the overflow from the road and from a willing neighbor but was not able. Word spread amongst the neighborhood and shortly thereafter, I received the instructions. "Drive to the end of the road. It is the last house on the left. You will see a white truck and a white Jeep. Pull in and honk your horn so that we can make sure the German Shephard is in. Then, I will meet you and take you for a canoe ride to see the overflow." Very explicit instructions. And they worked. I was not involved in a confrontation with the German Shephard and I was able to spot the problematic cesspool.

I enjoy meeting people. I am there to help and that is usually greeted with gratitude. Sometimes, however, I meet people who have mental health problems and I wish I wasn't alone. I think of the man who paced back and forth, running his hands through his hair, telling me in outbursts about the barking dog and the crying children! When this happens, I have found it is best to speak softly and calmly. The man acknowledged he had problems and was being treated for them. I admit that I was thankful this was a situation I could give to another department.

Some people want to do the right thing and just need some assistance. They might need some time. They might need some financial help. If I can find that assistance, I am happy to pass it along.

Others are angry at the world and want to argue about everything. Here's an example: I arrive to talk about overflowing rubbish and they want to talk about the neighbor's overgrown grass, the abundance of mice (because of their neighbor's grass) and the sumac trees. They have called "the town" on numerous occasions. And no one in the Town is doing anything about the invasive sumac trees! (I don't know who they called, or what they expected.) I finally had to

leave, as their list of complaints was so long and was getting repetitive. I retreated, telling them that my expectation of rubbish barrels was reasonable and achievable. I asked if they could they do that. They said, yes, they could. They were not happy, though.

Speaking of not happy, I am reminded of a woman I was dealing with one summer many years ago when we were at high risk for the deadly EEE, Eastern Equine Encephalitis. One of my missions was to respond to mosquito breeding areas, including unused swimming pools, filled with green stagnant water. There are a variety of ways to mitigate the situation. You can empty the pool. You can treat it with bleach. You can apply a product such as Mosquito Dunks, with the naturally occurring BTi that targets only mosquito larvae. Just choose a plan and make it happen! Well, this woman made promises but wasn't making it happen. So, I suggested she speak to the board. When I was speaking to her on the phone, she said in a demeaning voice, "What are you going to do, Cathy, slap my hand?"

She presented her plan to the board, though, and thankfully, it happened. Having one child die from EEE in your town is one too many.

Yes, there are difficult people and angry people and people with layers of challenges. Most of them can be helped. Most of our interactions are positive ones. Most are thankful. I am thankful for that, too.

Yes, it takes all kinds. And we need to be kind. Even when we are tough, it is the kind thing to do because there is a reason for public health regulations. They save lives and prevent disease and injury. We hope for a smooth ride when applying these regulations. It doesn't always play out like that, though.

All kinds of people, all kinds of situations, all kinds of solutions.

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