

ZONE 108 REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – AUGUST 2019

“Children should have enough freedom to be themselves – once they’ve learned the rules.”

Reaching senior status is about being recognised for one’s capacity to attain a position of seniority according to a particular proficiency or position in life. You and I have reached senior ranks because of our age; a characteristic that we once held at arm’s length but now it’s in our face (literally!) I suggest that our status entitles us to make comment on stuff that causes us concern because it goes against the grain of our parental upbringing; not all of us but I suspect a significant number nevertheless.

I shudder when I am confronted by television footage of teenage children defying parents over their right to embrace digital technology as if their very life depended on it. I wonder how parents can combat this insidious, all encompassing, phenomenon which causes some children to be totally dependent on electronic devices and I wonder what detrimental impact the addiction may have on their health (both physical and mental) as they age. Most of all I wonder what happened to the rules that we as children accepted about being respectful to others!

Respect for parents, teachers, police, those in authority and adults to whom we were introduced; that was all part and parcel of growing up and later on in life it embraced the boss and others within one’s chosen vocation. In previous generations society demanded that certain rules were to be followed but now it seems that the old adage *“Rules were meant to be broken”* is being pushed to the limit, mostly for all the wrong reasons.

The world in which we grew up has changed dramatically and I wouldn’t begin to elaborate on that, other than to say that digital technology has become all encompassing. Many previous forms of employment are now superfluous, especially within the manufacturing and consumer industries. Whilst all this electronic wizardry may be a boon to the Board Room, one doesn’t have to be a Philadelphia lawyer to work out the down side, which equates to less forms of manual employment. The transition from school to work is not as easy as we had it and even today’s students, fortunate to secure a place within a tertiary institute, are not guaranteed means of employment on graduation.

Another complicating factor being faced by children is the breakdown of family relations and we are witnessing a greater instance of single parent/grandparents management at a time when parental control is so crucial to their needs. The line of least resistance is dominant in some family circles where “out of sight out of mind” is probably the root cause of children losing themselves in a fantasy world of electronic games. The problem confronting parents is how to break the cycle which isolates children within the family home; somewhat similar to the problems we experienced back in the 50s when television first came to town, although in those days teenagers were mostly in work or seeking higher education through tertiary institutions. Mum usually set the rules regarding viewing time so that homework, music practice and household chores were not compromised.

However, a generation later, two major issues have emerged which make the management process a lot harder to control: both parents working to service huge mortgages and teenagers unable to secure employment. Parents must therefore be strong enough to instil in their children a passion for seeking work and building a résumé to enhance their opportunities for employment, be it at the lowest level in an area less desirable. They should also be providing them avenues to achieve physical achievement within realistic goals, with incentives to match; they are then more likely to accept the challenge of having a go and getting out and about. And finally, I recall my National Service Training (NST) days with great enthusiasm as during that time the Navy taught me a great deal more on what respect is all about; respect for one’s self and for one another. NST is just another way of keeping idle minds and bodies active and the benefits are huge. Maybe some far-seeing political ‘genius’ will have enough gumption to advocate National Service training as a game changer for teenagers at risk of becoming a digital robot. Some politicians just love reinventing the wheel and claiming discovery rights!