

# Professional insight

## Dealing with those everyday issues

By Doug McCarthy

### **carpe diem**

After the death of Robin Williams, my extended family spent an evening watching the movie *Dead Poets Society*. At the end, my grandson, who is just entering high school, exclaimed that he was inspired by John Keating, the teacher and lead character played by Robin Williams. One can see why, with lines like, “You must trust that your beliefs are unique and your own, even though others may think them odd or unpopular.” And “In the end we only regret the chances we didn’t take, relationships we were afraid to have, and the decisions we waited too long to make.”

These are definitely inspiring words, but in the strictest sense, not motivational. What’s the difference? In simple terms people can be motivated by words that promise reward or punishment. Inspirational words on the other hand carry with them the kind of truth and courage that inspires others to change from within.

For example, when I spot a police car, I am immediately motivated to check my driving habits to avoid being punished with a ticket. If I was inspired by values within me, I would drive carefully at all times because this is how we get along as a society and survive on our roadways.

Another example is that I could be motivated to pay my taxes because there are punishments forthcoming if I don’t. Or, I could be inspired to contribute my share to society because then we all enjoy benefits from such things as health and educational systems, and provide supports to those who are marginalized in our society. Or, I may be in a situation where I am motivated because I receive a bonus for doing my best. An inspired person would do their best anyway, regardless of the bonus.

The carrot and stick approach to motivation does work in some cases, but by its very nature is narrow in focus, restricting possibilities and limiting success.

On the other hand, words that animate, enliven, excite and invigorate can stimulate others to direct their own lives and instill a desire to get better at something that matters and to be a better person.

How rewarding to be seen as someone who inspires – whether a teacher, a leader, a speaker, we are able to make others believe, as John Keating did, “No matter what anyone tells you, your words and ideas can change the world.”