

Keep the ‘Mustn’t Grumbles’ Away from Social Media!

Shôn Ellerton, April 9, 2021

Those who tend not to grumble are often portrayed as having good manners and decorum. But keep them well away from social media!



A couple of months ago, we had a helicopter circling around our relatively quiet suburb. It is not uncommon for helicopters to fly about in the area from time to time, but we had, what seemed to be, weeks and weeks of prolonged flying. Many of us in the neighbourhood thought it might be some sort of emergency, perhaps, looking for a missing person, or maybe updating aerial photographs of the suburb but we eventually concluded that it was probably flight training. And, indeed, it was, but only after receiving belated communication from the local police that it was so. And the communication was received only after our local member of parliament submitted a letter to the appropriate authorities requesting an explanation of the disturbances.

In any case, the continuous and noisy whirling of a helicopter endlessly circling around a generally peaceful suburb is not welcome by any means. Especially, if no explanation is provided to the residents who must live through it. But this article is not just about the helicopter, but rather an observation I came across: when those of a ‘mustn’t grumble’ mindset which I will simply call the *mustn’t grumbles* mixes with social media. I will come back to *mustn’t grumbles* and helicopters, but meantime, let me give some context to this.

I will also cover the interesting reactions from the residents of the neighbourhood through a local networking website called au.nextdoor.com, which is basically a sort of Facebook for the local neighbourhood to primarily keep everyone in touch about garage sales, local businesses, break-ins, speeding

hoons, nice pictures of the neighbourhood, and so on. Not surprisingly, this networking site has attracted trolls, bad behaviour and, something I recently came across, those under an anonymous guise with nefarious motives. As with much of today's main diet of social media, toxicity in the form of those taking pleasure in making negative comments or purporting their self-effacing ideals onto others has become rife to the point of being not quite as useful as it was meant to be. And what occurred to me was this. Many of the trolls I encountered have the behavioural characteristics of when the traditional *mustn't grumbles* of olden days become weaponised with today's online social media.

Now, what are the *mustn't grumbles*? The *mustn't grumbles* are those, when in the face of discomfort, distress, or an unpleasant situation put on a brave face and say, 'Mustn't grumble'. My late Welsh grandmother had this disposition. Given a lukewarm cup of tea in a restaurant rather than a nice hot piping one, she would sit back and state, 'Mustn't grumble'. Now this is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly in circumstances where everyone should be helping everyone to overcome a bad situation, such as a war or a pandemic. Many grandparents of my generation lived through circumstances in which being choosy in times of crisis is simply not heard of. If one received a slightly bruised batch of apples during a food shortage, one is unlikely to make a 'song and dance' of it. The *mustn't grumble* mentality is to exhibit a form of stoicism and appreciation of something, usually taken in the context or surroundings not suited for it. For example, if I was to order a cup of tea from a nice restaurant, I would expect a reasonably good quality loose-leaf tea served in a nice cup but if I was to receive a cup of tea from my son's scouts group, I would, most likely be offered a Styrofoam cup with a Lipton's teabag in it with not-quite-so-boiling water added to it. If someone said to me, 'Not the best tea, is it?' I would respond accordingly. 'True, but, mustn't grumble.' And this, I believe, is the right response because I, at least, have been given a cup of tea rather than not have one at all. One would not likely grumble in this situation.

The problem with the *mustn't grumble* mentality occurs when it is universally applied across *all* circumstances in combination with signalling to others that they should not grumble either. I do stereotype here, but hear me out. The English are one of the prime candidates for being the world's best examples of *mustn't grumbles*, closely followed by New Zealand and Australia. Now on the other side of my family lies the Germans. Totally different. Yes, they certainly do display the *mustn't grumble* mentality in situations which really warrant it;

however, in those that do not, the Germans will not. Neither will the Americans, and I know this, because I was raised there. If an American is given substandard service or bad food in a restaurant, it is usually likely that they will complain about it on the spot with the staff, and, if they are well-mannered, away from being heard by other patrons, whereas the British will take the opposite approach by persevering with the meal and only after, will they complain to *others* about the restaurant. This near-passive aggressive approach is damaging to the restaurant in two ways. First, potential first-time customers will be steered away from it and second, the restaurant staff do not have any feedback where they went wrong. This explains, largely, why the service industry in the United States is far superior to that in Britain. Now living in Australia, I perceive the service industry in Australia sitting precariously between the two in an oddball-like fashion. For example, experiencing great food and service albeit with far more limited opening hours missing much-needed custom. I stress throughout that I am generalising, of course.

Another interesting example I recollect is when they attempted to install road speed cameras—or in politically-correct parlance, safety cameras—in a city in Canada, where, the residents in response put up quite a fight to have them removed. The Canadians have more in common with the Americans in terms of assertiveness whereas the British just seem to take everything up the proverbial backside without question resulting in the prolific spread of ‘safety’ and CCTV surveillance cameras making it one of the world’s, if not, the most surveilled nation on the planet. I will be very clear that I do not condone dangerous driving by any means, but simply building more speed cameras, often on stretches of road where they are needed but only to raise additional revenue is not the answer in reducing counts of dangerous driving.

Back to the helicopter and the local online networking website, nextdoor.com. I started a new post politely enquiring what all the helicopter activity was all about. Perhaps, someone would know about it. Sure enough, comments came through thick and thin.

‘They’re looking for a missing person, probably.’

‘Taking photos of our backyards to check if we have built anything without council permission.’

‘Searching for illegal plants being grown in greenhouses’

‘Looking for my friend Rob who made out with my brother’s wife last night’
(I assume, jokingly)

Many stated that it was police or other emergency services training, whereas in response, many questioned why in this neighbourhood and not in the rural areas where fewer residents could be disturbed?

A further slurry of responses came back.

‘Because it is not realistic to train in the country where there are no people.’

‘The undulating landscape of the suburb makes it ideal for training.’

And so on.

But then the responses got uglier and uglier. Bear in mind that the continuous activity by the helicopter had been going several hours a day for nearly three solid weeks by this time without a formal notification from anyone.

One replied, ***‘Why can’t they train elsewhere for a while?’*** (a reasonable suggestion)

To which a *mustn’t grumble* replied. ***‘We shouldn’t make a fuss of it and neither should we complain. They are just doing their job’***

Then another user joined in the discussion with a made-up name and no profile picture, a typical characteristic of a troll. He (or she) said, ***‘How would YOU like it if you needed to be rescued and there was no helicopter?’*** (but with poor spelling and grammar)

Another joined in, ***‘Yeah, it’s people like you who complain about everything.’*** (after ‘liking’ the previous respondent)

Yet another one had the audacity to say this.

‘My parents survived through the worst of the war [presumably in Europe?], fighting the enemy, bombed to oblivion amidst a time of severe food rationing and being able to persevere though it. You should be ashamed of complaining about a mere helicopter.’

This is scale of how toxic this can get. I start off with a simple and polite question regarding a helicopter flying for unusually long periods of time. Very quickly, with no further intervention on my part, it culminates in trying to

shame me—for even starting the post—throwing Churchillian sentiments of stoicism and resolution more appropriate during a period of crisis or war.

This is seriously crazy.

Now if this had all occurred with real people talking to each other in a room where everybody can see one another, this rapid escalation of toxicity would never have happened. Which, of course, illustrates the importance of either meeting people in the flesh or picking up the phone, especially on points of debate where opinions may differ enormously.

When comparing the above relatively benign and seemingly uncontroversial topic to those of some of the most hotly debated like race and transgender issues, it is absolutely no wonder how such demonically-possessed, thuggish, vitriolic, nasty, reprehensible, and disgusting behaviour with ill or even murderous intentions thrives on social media.

So, I say this. Keep the *mustn't grumbles* well away from social media!