

WHAT MATTERS MORE TO ME AND WHY

Lueny Morell @ 3/18/2014

My first memories are related to my family - parents, sister and grandparents - with whom we lived. On one side there was enormous warmth and love, on another, stress and fear. Admiration, colluding with some high expectations very hard to satisfy. Family devotion, conspiring with firm discipline. These memories and my growing up attending catholic school certainly shaped my life and my personality to this day. My life is moved by my faith - I am in God's hands and I fully trust that whatever comes my way is for a reason I perhaps do not fully understand. I believe that giving, unconditionally and without expecting anything back, is the key to happiness. Giving not what one has in excess, but that which we may even have less of. Giving time, resources, life, love, even if it actually hurts, is true joy. Isn't this what happens when you give birth to new life? When you give out a most valuable jewel? When you donate money to worthy causes? When you are married for 40 years, in good times and in bad times?

That I ended up becoming an engineer by chance and later an engineering professor by opportunity is no coincidence. These undertakings have given me the opportunity to confirm this value, this notion that giving is the key to happiness. Von Karman describes engineering as "*the creation of what never was*"¹. In other words, creating solutions to problems that affect business, society, Earth. Developing products and services that are useful to others. God handed me the most perfect profession I could wish for! Moreover, He allowed me to have the unique opportunity to touch the lives of so many students over my 24 year career as a professor of chemical engineering. And not only by encouraging their learning of technology but also by just by listening to their life's challenges (many of them dropped by the office just to talk and dream).

Indeed, teaching has been one of the most important happenings of my life. Well, besides having three extraordinary children, who have taught me more life lessons than the most prestigious collection of gurus could conceivably do. Becoming an engineer gave me the tools and competencies to be able to give my talents in a very effective and efficient way and help me deal with life's endeavors. Becoming an engineering professor gave me the opportunity to realize how much there is to learn (and how little we know) and how important is this profession to the world's well-being. Later in life I had the opportunity to switch careers and join industry. Wow! What a change in environments, expectations and time schedules. Fortunately, my job allowed me to continue with my service focus. So, in addition to serving 'my clients' at the company, I continued to teach and mentor others and catalyzing opportunities for talent development around the world.

Now life has given me another chance to link my value of giving to what I do. This time I have been invited to develop a new and unique engineering school with a new vision, mission and strategy. I trust that our institution's model of making learning fun and pertinent provides students graduating from our programs with better prospects of leading a rewarding life. And I hope that as life goes on I remain open to the opportunities God will continue to provide, taking one step at a time always with the end in mind, with the conviction that leadership entails serving the best interests of others. I believe we, engineering professors, have one of (if not the) the most critical responsibilities in the world: that of developing the human resources with the capacities to make a better world. And may I continue to follow what I share at the end of most of my presentations (per Francis of Assisi exhortation): "*Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.*"

¹ From Henry Petroski, *The Essential Engineer: Why Science Alone Will Not Solve Our Global Problems*, 2010