

CHRISTMAS BRUNCH 2005

I gave this presentation at the company Christmas party in December of 2005. I'd intended to retire in the following year, so it provided a good time & venue to toast and roast Henry- my boss (and although I didn't realize it at first) my mentor and as time went by- my friend. As I recall, there were a hundred or so folks present.



The holiday season is upon us again and in a year of earthquakes, hurricanes, war, sky high energy prices and corporate bankruptcies, it's a time to reflect yet again on our good fortune.

With so many companies led and staffed by power junkies, hair-trigger paranoiacs, self satisfied aggrandizers, ball-droppers and outright crooks, General Plastics offers a productive refuge, made possible by our individual and communal effort, and by Henry's capital, vision and extraordinarily able stewardship.

I'm going to talk about Henry now, and by necessity it's about the Henry that I know. Henry's personality appears multifaceted at first glance, kind' a like that car paint that depending on viewing angle looks either green

or purple. But underneath the paint it's the same Henry- a Henry seemingly invariant with respect to place or circumstance. You'll notice I didn't say with respect to time, because Henry is still in the process of becoming- older and wiser certainly, and only a little less intense....

Henry had already been here a couple of years in early 1970 when I started out in the shop making foam ducts and working in the shipping department. Back when I started there was no written test to pass- it seemed the company would hire anyone who could fog a mirror.

Henry was the contract administrator and plant engineer under the watchful eye of Lou Schatz his dad and company founder.

Henry was a lot younger and thinner back then, but still formidable (at least to a shipping clerk)!

One Friday, about nine months after I started, Bill Deathridge who ran Plant-I, stopped by to say I was being laid off, but- Mr. (Lou) Schatz had explained that I was to return the following Monday to be hired back a salaried inspector. Bill handed me my paycheck that had the words “last check” typed on it.

After a stressful weekend being unemployed, Monday morning came around and I went up to the plant II office, which in those days was separate from the plant I office. I’d hardly ever talked to Henry before, but everyone called him by his first name, so I did too. Henry looked up when I walked in. “What are you doing here?” I replied that “Mr. Schatz said that I was to be hired as an inspector”. I still remember the reply. “We don’t need another inspector.” Henry then lifted the phone and called his dad up in the front office arguing that the company only needed one inspector- an argument Henry thankfully lost. After that... things only got better.

In early Henry encounters, I’d come away with the feeling that he was complicated, and strange, very strange.

He could be both pleasant and demanding at the same time, and when on a mission- relentless. He could outlast you. He could wear

you down. Henry was never satisfied if I just gave in to his requests. It did no good to say “I disagree- but I’ll do it because you’re the boss”.

That would only energize him into expounding his position yet again. Henry wasn’t satisfied *until I agreed with his way of thinking*, and on the occasions where I wasn’t won over, I could sense Henry’s disappointment... and knew that he would continue his tutorial at some later time. Most bosses that I’d had in the past would say: “Don’t think. Just do what you’re told”. As time went by, I came around to the rather startling conclusion that Henry was more interested in my learning how to think than on me just mindlessly doing what I was told! Strange indeed!

In the days of typewriters and carbon paper, revisions to reports were really time consuming, but of course Henry expected, if not perfection a very high standard of accuracy and presentation, which made my life difficult since I didn’t mind living with columns that didn’t quite line up, or titles that were off-center. Nevertheless, as the years went by I began thinking more before typing, thinking more before experimenting, thinking more before testing, thinking before doing anything. And then, gaud- I found myself thinking more and more like Henry.

Anyone who believes that they can work closely with Henry Schatz for extended periods and escape some degree of “mind-meld”

is very mistaken. Of course the part of one's mind that doesn't meld can become very frustrated. Notice I don't say angry. It's quite impossible to stay angry at Henry- since there's nothing mean about him. But he is principled... and of course stubbornness and principles tend to go together.

There are supposedly three kinds of people in the world.

those who make things happen
those who watch things happen, and
those who wonder what happened.

Actually there are probably four:
as there are *those who are unaware that anything's happened.* (You can guess what department we put them in).

Henry is an exemplar of the first category. Henry makes things happen- by doing, by direction, by example.

Now, I don't know where Henry's drive comes from. It's probably deep inside him somewhere- though I wouldn't want to fish around for it during Christmas brunch. But Henry seems to have an internal drive to accomplish good, which may sound corny to some, but it's true.

Henry possesses many qualities that are worth our consideration so I've listed some of them:

- Henry has an extraordinary *passion* (and *intellectual capacity*) for work.
- He's a skilled negotiator (phenomenal would be a better word).
- He doesn't give in too early- he's patient. He outlasts his opponents.
- Henry isn't paralyzed by the fear of failure and is willing to take calculated risks. He's fortunately equipped with a mental calculator that gives surprisingly good predictions- even with incomplete data.
- Whenever possible, Henry tries the simplest things first.
- He's not seduced by technical ideas or equipment just because they're sexy or "technically sweet." It has to be cost effective.
- He looks underneath the surface of things- of events, people, phenomena.
- He is intensely curious and always learning- which becomes more important as one gets older. After all: *Only those that die very young learn everything they need to know in the first grade.*
- He doesn't suffer fools gladly- or laziness or unethical behavior, *and neither should we.*
- Henry's loyal and he rewards loyalty, accomplishment and to some degree- honest effort, even if only with partial success.
- Henry's generous with credit and with praise... and just plain generous.
- Finally, Henry has the personal courage to do what he thinks is right.

Henry is also very human, with a great sense of humor. He can laugh at himself. He has his good and bad days, can act rashly or misjudge people or events. And like all of us, he can be hurt.

On the downside- Henry's sense of time is different from ours, and those of us who work with him closely learn to make allowances. It isn't that Henry's temporally challenged, he just doesn't accept time's dictates. If it wasn't for the last minute, Henry would nearly always be late.

Otherwise, Henry's like the rest of us (or I perhaps I should say Henry is like the best of us) only smarter, taller inside, and a lot more intense.

Yogi Berra is credited with saying, "You can see a lot by watching." You can also hear a lot by listening. Over the years I've had an unusual opportunity to watch and to listen.

Henry's truly unpretentious. I've never heard him brag about his accomplishments or his wealth. Conversely, he's never intimidated into silence by others, whatever their position or accomplishments.

I've had the opportunity to be around Henry away from work- at dinner conversations with a former Washington governor, with the president of the UW, with world class scientists, and with three Microsoft billionaires. And in every case Henry was his same unassuming

self; asking (with great enjoyment) disarmingly simple but penetrating questions that leave his listeners squirming.

Young children are great questioners and in this respect Henry has never grown up. Perhaps it's because of his intense curiosity about nearly everything- a curiosity that's been a lifelong affliction.

This curiosity leads him to search for ultimate answers to the deepest questions- particularly:

Why is there something rather than nothing?

What's it all about?

Why are we here?

Henry thinks I should know the answers- though, just because you can frame a question doesn't mean it has an answer. You see- I tend to think of conciseness as just a sliver of light between two eternities of darkness.

Henry, on the other hand figures it's more like a sliver of dawn preceding an eternity of light. -Which makes Henry the optimist.

Of course a sliver of eternity may still be an eternity... though I haven't quite worked that one out.

In any case, we've enjoyed our philosophical discussions for years (decades now) and I don't expect to escape them even in retirement.

As the years have gone by General Plastics has evolved into a great organization, though

evolved doesn't completely describe of our progress. Our success is more a result of Henry's *Intelligent Design* or more accurately still, his *Benevolent Design*. In business speak: *Henry has exceeded our expectations*. Under his leadership (and for the last few years) his oversight, we've come a long way from the pickle plant in Nalley Valley.

In a year or two, Henry will most likely fade away from General Plastics. But with hard work (and a little luck) those of you *left behind*, will move on to bigger and better things- which is Henry's deep and abiding expectation. And I'm confident that under Floyd's guidance the company will continue to prosper.

But even when there's no longer a Henry Schatz to oversee operations, I'm sure he'll stop by from time to time to see how well you're doing (as will I). And hopefully in time you will individually and collectively grow to the point where Henry's considerable skills and knowledge become superfluous. For truly, there is no practicable limit on what you can accomplish if you set your minds and hearts to it. And once you find out the wonderful things you can do with your minds-

you'll discover that creative, productive accomplishment is a lifelong addiction.

Some day- many years from now, Henry may hobble into the plant, and looking around, might well feel as a one, who after long absence returns to their old home and wanders through rooms, filled not with the present that will have come to be... but with a lifetime of slowly fading memories.

So, while we're all here together- let us say *thank you* now. Please grab a glass, push back your chairs and stand up so we can do this right.

I propose a toast: To Henry Schatz. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity and the tools to succeed, for setting standards that we've had to stretch for and pestering us until we got it right. Thank you for strength in troubled times, a steady hand in when we needed it, your generosity ... and your friendship.

Long life and happiness.

clw 12/9/2005