

Reflections of Alfredo M. Lopez

One of the benefits of being awarded this significant honor is the opportunity to spend some time reflecting on my engineering career and the driving forces and influences that helped me shape it. I was born in Havana, Cuba where I attended a Jesuit high school, which prepared me very well for a technical career and positions of leadership.

In 1961, my father relocated the family to the United States. He did that out of a strong desire to see his children grow and prosper in a free country. It is clear to me now that my father represented the strongest influence in my life and in my career. He was a civil engineer and a professor of civil engineering at the University of Havana. He also ran a small engineering company where I was able to make some money during the summer and weekends. From my father and his work, I learned the enjoyment of an engineering career and inherited his enthusiasm for resolving technical problems.

In 1962, I enrolled at LSU in the Chemical Engineering Department. I selected LSU for its fine reputation in the South

and because it was the lowest cost university where I could get a fine education. I feel very grateful to LSU. Its Chemical Engineering Department, headed by Dr. Jesse Coates, was one of the best in the University and the undergraduate program, one of the best in the country. To this day, I remember the faculty very well, their quality of teaching, their challenges and the enthusiasm for the profession that they instilled in me. I believe they also were a strong influence in my career. After receiving a B.S. degree, I concluded that my education was just starting and enrolled in the Ph.D. Program.

I selected my field of expertise, automatic control of chemical processes, after working very closely with Dr. Paul Murrill. Paul had just begun his career as a member of the faculty and a pioneer in the new field of computer control of industrial processes. From Paul, I learned a love of teaching and of my technical field.

After receiving my Ph.D. under Paul, I joined Esso Research and Engineering. My plan was to spend two or three

years with one of the best research and engineering companies in the country to get industrial experience and then start a teaching career, which has become my career objective. That was almost thirty-four years ago. At the end of the first three years I was having too much fun in my work to return to a university. I got to be pretty good in my technical field and in producing results, and the company asked me to consider a technical management career.

My first management job was in a very different technical field, a field in which I was no longer a technical expert. I now realize that that assignment taught me how to work with people, how to trust and rely on my subordinates, and how to delegate and exert leadership. Many technical and business management assignments followed with new learnings. Perhaps the most important was how to enjoy and feel pride for the accomplishments of my subordinates.

I have had a very challenging and enjoyable career, which is still continuing. Whatever success I reached, I owe to the many people that provide guidance and served as role models, and to the strong support of my wife and family.