

## **In Memory and Praise of Richard Muther**

When Louise gave me the honor of eulogizing Dick Muther, I thought it would be easy to prepare. But then I began to contemplate the enormity of Dick's accomplishments and the distinct communities of family, personal friends and professional associates here today, each with our own reflections.

So, I have struggled to organize my thoughts and remarks. I trust that you won't mind if they ramble a bit. Or that I am reading in hopes of keeping my emotions in check. Along the way, I hope each of you will recall memories or cherished traits and concur with my praises for Dick and his life well lived.

Listing Dick's achievements would consume my allotted time. And you can read those in his obituary and in his autobiography. Instead, I will celebrate the outstanding personal qualities that enabled his greatness. They are exemplary and thus instructive for our remaining time in this world.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Quality. Dick was highly-principled and therefore totally consistent.**

In 40 years, I never saw Dick out of character; never once say or do anything inconsistent. Dick was totally committed to reaching for the best – the best way, the best outcome, the best in himself, and the best in those around him. Dick was equally committed to standard methods and conduct. Why? Because he observed in industry that standards enable successful endeavors to be widely replicated by others. They are essential for human progress.

His principles included gentlemanly and Christian conduct in all things. Did you ever hear Dick utter an unkind or disparaging word about anyone – even when he was mistreated or shown disrespect or jealousy by fellow professionals? Did you ever hear him speak ill of public figures? Did you ever hear Dick curse? Never! Not even “darn it.” Dick rarely lost his temper. The few heated exchanges that I can recall were never personal; they were always about the application of principles or progress toward a goal.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Quality. Dick was persistent and remarkably tenacious.**

Dick often worked on an engineering or intellectual problem or a book for years, even decades, before declaring it resolved and writing it up. He never resorted to expediency and never cut corners.

Those who worked with him on projects or books were often ready to call our task “done” long before he was satisfied. I eventually recognized that Dick expected no more from us than he did of himself. He simply believed that a thing worth doing should be done to the highest standards, and he was holding us to his. Many of us here have chafed at Dick's criticisms. But upon reflection, we had to concede that his points were valid and constructive.

Dick was remarkably self-disciplined, committed to standard practice and incredible at time management. Watching him in action was quite an experience. He remembered and

observed every rule, every procedure that he ever set. He always worked in order, from highest priority and urgency, never starting with the easiest or quickest, as most folks do.

His results speak for themselves. In the field of industrial engineering Dick's methods are gold standards. As widely used today as 50 years ago when first introduced; perhaps more widely. All who encounter them immediately recognize their power and utility; their simplicity and ease of use. Their structure is so elegant and universally applicable that they are grasped in any language with virtually no translation.

In the 1950s and 60s, Dick developed dozens of printed working forms and templates for organizing and processing technical information and making decisions. Today these same forms are offered on the Internet as electronic spreadsheets. Thousands of people from more than 20 countries use them on a regular basis. Major corporations refer to them as the Muther methods and make their use standard practice. No doubt, Dick's creations will be used for as long as industrial engineering is practiced – which is to say more or less forever. We still get regular requests for his early books, including one this week from Finland. Name another technical book that is still saleable and current after 40 or 50 years. That's how timeless Dick's methods are.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Quality. Dick was engaging and always approachable;** never aloof or preoccupied and always humble. He was rightfully proud of his creations, but he never let recognition and accolades go to his head. His pride was in the acceptance and use of his work and the betterment that it achieved, not in his personal standing.

If you showed interest, he reciprocated. In fact, you were “drafted” and he would quickly give you an assignment. At the same time Dick was there for you. He would coach and participate or even give himself an assignment that helped you reach your goal. He spent thousands of hours in this way, driven by some inner sense of duty or obligation.

Dick said he had difficulty meeting and interacting with people. If so, he overcame it on a regular basis, applying his remarkable self-discipline. Dick taught perhaps 1,000 workshops. Before each event, his standard procedure was to work his way around the room, engaging each person in conversation about their job, their company, their home town. In this way, he became everyone's friend before 8:00 AM.

**4<sup>th</sup> Quality. Dick was possessed with boundless energy and enthusiasm.**

If normal human energy generates ripples on a pond, Dick was like a wind turbine churning up a lake. If we are each like a pebble cast into a pond, Dick ran a conveyor belt from his own rock quarry. He never tired and seemed connected to some higher or deeper source of power.

Rather than slowing down in his 60s or 70s, Dick sped up, producing some of his most significant writings and professional contributions in his 80s and 90s. He prepared and conducted a half-day workshop at age 100.

Even in his late 90s, Dick could wear you out. Hakan Butuner is here today all the way from Turkey. On his last visit, when Dick was 98, Hakan and I spent several days working with Dick on one of his developments. As the hours passed, we became tired and ready to leave for the day. But Dick was still going strong. The only way we could escape was by accepting evening assignments, knowing that Dick would keep working after we left.

At meal time when everyone else looked forward to “checking out,” Dick always took along paper and pencil. He might tolerate a little small talk, but would inevitably re-direct toward the shared tasks of the day or an idea he was working on. He would often leave the table with a page or two of scribbled notes. If you do the math, he probably gained a couple of man-years this way, making him effectively 102 years old.

He also kept a pad and pencil bedside in case he awoke during the night with a good idea or conclusion to some problem. If that happened with even modest frequency over 50 or 60 years, then Dick worked at least another man-year, making him 103 in normal years.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Quality. Dick was inventive and visionary.**

Many people have made influential contributions in their fields. But how many have invented a new field? Rare indeed is the person who generates an entire body of knowledge. Yet Dick did just that in more than one field.

I have already mentioned his outstanding and timeless contributions to industrial engineering. He tired of that field back in the 1980s. For the past 25 years, with modest assistance from some of us here today, he developed and published a new science of planning. While this may seem obscure or academic, it is actually fundamental to the process of human decision-making in all walks of life. He articulated in writing and carefully-crafted illustrations a general method for any type of planning. Dick called the latest edition of this method: Planning by Design. He considered it his finest and most important development. His goal: help people to become better planners, thus producing better plans and ultimately better outcomes in all that we do. Dick believed that mankind has largely mastered the challenges of physical productivity but that we remain weak in our mental productivity. He fervently believed that we will recognize this weakness and put his method to work. Dick often proclaimed: “Planning will be the demand skill of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” As always, I think he is right.

#### **Dick was old-fashioned yet ahead of his time.**

These are not personal qualities, but noteworthy in appreciating the man. Dick paired a 19<sup>th</sup> century work ethic with futuristic thinking. Six-day work weeks were his norm, and he expected as much from his associates. We held meetings on Saturdays to preserve time for customers. And he regularly worked mornings during his long family vacations.

Dick authored 18 books and monographs, many technical articles and client reports, and more than 5000 pages of training material. He wrote every first draft in long hand. He never sat at a typewriter or used a keyboard. Drafts were typed by others, then marked up and re-written by hand. Dick likely wrote more than one million words in this way.

While his work ethic and authoring methods were out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his approach to education and training was and still is 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

Dick saw no reason why a college course could not be conducted and digested in 5 days at most. He engineered his instruction to deliver a new idea every eight minutes, all reinforced by practical applications and team-based exercises adapted from real life. If Dick's methods were the norm today, an undergraduate degree should be attainable in one year.

His course materials were rigorously standardized so that every qualified instructor would make identical points in the same highly-engineered sequence, preparing every learner to pass a standardized test. This meant that you didn't need the sage on the stage. You could get Dick Muther's expert instruction from the far-less experienced Lee Hales or whoever was available. These are the underlying pre-cursors of today's computer-based, self-paced instruction. Dick was already there in the 1950s. His courseware was so impactful that people still recall their first Muther course 30 or even 40 years later. What they remember was their amazingly rapid mastery of new material.

When his books first came out, Dick even had to fight with publishers to adopt his innovative "lay-flat" comb bindings. They were precursors of today's software user manuals, carefully designed to get useful results on the job, not just to catalog or impart knowledge.

How about Dick's method for multiple careers planning, published almost 30 years ago! Only today do we recognize the need for people to regularly re-tool as entire job categories become obsolete or migrate off shore; or as increased longevity demands productive use of our later years.

And of course, Planning by Design, the demand skill of our young 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dick published the essential elements of this method back in 1988.

Throughout his adult life, Dick was an advance man for industrialization. He left his fingerprints and footprints all over the industrial world. In the 1940s, he wrote one of the first textbooks on mass production. It still reads well today and pre-dates by 50 years a lot of what we now call Lean Thinking.

In the 1950s and 60s Dick was a "go-to" resource for America's post-war expansion.

By the mid 1960s, Dick was in Japan, where they couldn't bring on industrial capacity fast enough. The Japan Management Association translated his methods and books and made them central to their factory planning services. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Toyota, Nissan and numerous others came here on regular study missions to meet with Dick Muther.

Most people think that Communist China opened up to modernization in the early 1990s. Dick and Louise were already there by 1982 as guests of the government. Dick worked with a group of 34 engineers – six days a week for three months – teaching them how to plan modern factories to replace outdated Soviet era facilities. Those engineers then trained others and the government opened 8 regional consulting offices to further spread the know-how. The Chinese

still have a thirst and need for Dick's methods and we currently train about 150 per year. Every session sells out.

Last April, one of those first engineers, Mr. Baode, now retired and in his 80s, learned that I was teaching in Shanghai and that Dick was still alive. He traveled all day by train from Beijing – farther than New York to Chicago –, staying overnight to meet me for dinner and relay his gratitude to Dick and Louise.

Mr. Baode comes from very humble origins. As an early graduate of Dick's training, he went on to become a high ranking official in the largest state-owned engineering firm, overseeing the designing and building of factories throughout China.

He recounted through a translator what Dick's teachings had meant to him personally, to his associates at the time, and to the many companies that applied Dick's methods, including indirectly the employees and their families whose lives were made better by their factories' improved performance.

In 1986, he came on a study mission to the U.S. He had never been out of China and had never been entertained in anyone's home, since that is not practical even today for most Chinese of normal means. So coming to the Country Club district of Kansas City was a shock. Mr. Baode became quite emotional as he recounted the evening the group spent in Dick and Louise's home. He wiped his eyes and shook his head, saying it remains one of the highest honors of his life, to have been invited by such great people into their home for dinner. He then showed me some worn photos from 1982 and the 1986 visit. He must have shown or looked at them many times. Such is the impact that Dick and Louise have had on others. But what is most remarkable, is that Mr. Baode is just one example. Some of us here in the room have been similarly touched and benefitted. We could stay until dark citing examples.

Dick and Louise were global decades before global became cool. Beyond love of travel and adventure, both recognized the value and wisdom that come from international friendships and from experiencing other cultures and customs. My wife Pam and I used to joke that Dick and Louise ran their own People-to-People program. It seemed that there was always someone from overseas staying in their home or needing an apartment for a few weeks or months. And green cards requiring trips downtown...

By the early 1960s, Dick already had affiliates in Europe and Asia, actively exchanging ideas, methods and personnel. He and his associates routinely worked abroad and his affiliates worked over here. Dick hired me at age 25. By the time I was 30, he had put me on assignments in 5 foreign countries. Today that might be commonplace, but in the 1970s it was unheard of in all but the very largest engineering firms and a few international corporations. And even there, such assignments were not given to young employees.

### **Praiseworthy Roles in Life**

Dick's important roles in life are listed in his obituary. First and foremost: devoted husband, father, grand and great-grandfather; brother, uncle, cousin, in-law. In his professional

life: engineer, consultant, teacher, author. In his private life: friend, hunting buddy, fraternity brother, congregant, volunteer... the list is long. But three praiseworthy roles are missing.

### **1. Mentor**

Several of us here today have built successful careers as a result of Dick's mentoring. He helped many others achieve personal success and to make noteworthy contributions in their respective spheres. Dick was patient and gave generously of his time. He adopted our questions or challenges as his own and always gave useful advice.

### **2. Chief Cajoler**

Dick was an extra conscience, often when we needed it most. Some favorite beginnings: "Have we?" or more often "Why haven't we...?" Always "we" because he was just as committed to the outcome.

He was the ultimate taskmaster. Once you accepted an assignment, it was on your "to-do list" until you completed it. You could reschedule, or revisit later, but you could never just forget it or lose interest. Even if you didn't work for Dick, but just sought him out as a mentor, he would hold you to what you had agreed to do.

### **3. Investor in People & Ideas**

Dick was continually investing his time, energy and even his money in individuals who demonstrated an interest in his work or project of the moment. In the early years that meant industrial engineering and consulting, in later years the science and practice of planning.

I am just one example – a liberal arts graduate with no industrial experience. Dick hired me into a firm of professional engineers because I had shown interest in his methods and he saw enough potential to take a chance. Later, he and Louise even loaned us the money for graduate school. There are others here and around the world in whom Dick made similar investments over the years.

For the past 20 years, Dick personally funded the Institute of High Performance Planners. A number of us here today are members. He hosted a two-day meeting once or twice a year for members to learn from one another, and to give some feedback on his latest developments. I think Dick's short-term payback was adequate. But Dick was a patient investor in the long-term. I think he envisioned the real return on his investment to be what we ultimately contribute with the investment he made in us.

### **The Importance of Louise**

I cannot close without recognizing Louise Muther. We have all heard the expression: "Behind every great man there stands a woman." This was never truer than in Dick's case with Louise.

She unburdened him of all the mundane, routine and administrative tasks of daily business and life, freeing him to focus 100% on his work. There is no way that Dick writes his

books without Louise keeping hers – pun intended! In Dick’s business, she was the accounting and finance department, invoicing and collections agency, performance reporter, payroll department, personnel department... She ran the publishing company... the list goes on.

Most importantly, Louise was a trusted confidant and advisor. I am sure Dick consulted her on every big decision. Forty years ago, when Dick was interviewing me for a job, Louise was part of the process. Dick had me bring Pam to lunch with him and Louise. In a friendly way, Louise was interviewing Pam while also passing judgment on me. And I am sure Dick would have respected whatever verdict she rendered. Fortunately for Pam and me it was positive!

Louise was totally devoted to Dick and he was to her. Around the Hales house we think of them as a single entity “Dick-and-Louise.” Always thinking of and seeing them both. And we always will.

Thank you Louise for asking me to speak today.

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