

## *Our New Year's Message: 2019*

### *Gratitude Four-0*

December 4, 1978, was my starting date with a consulting firm that had been established twenty-five years prior in Worcester, Massachusetts. As a newly minted Ph.D., I knew most everything that was necessary to be known. That was until a trip in 1979, which was the start of a near ten-year involvement with an engineering construction firm in Ottawa, Canada. The president was a Romanian with a Ph.D. in engineering, and a good percentage of the professional staff was European. Starting out, it was frightening to not know their cultures, the technology or the demands placed upon them by their global customers. It was all too obvious, at least to me, how little I actually knew and how small my professional exposure was to the wider world.

What this client and many others taught me was to listen intently, ask pertinent questions and give counsel from within my experience base. That included adjusting my thinking again and again, taking no labels for granted, not even a statement as simple as, "This person is an engineer." Knowing what I did not know may be one of the greatest lessons learned by an individual seeking to be a professional and make a sustained contribution to his clientele.

Whether in Scotland, England, Germany, Brazil, Canada or the United States, the course of my professional travels has shown that there are good, effective people in every culture. Most people care to do well. They engage in focused efforts. With openness to input, they are serial learners. They typically adjust without rancor when circumstances change. They keep their strategic focus on the contributions they make to their group, organization and society. As leaders, they teach others what they know. They view managing their associates as a duty and an honor, not a burden or means of not working.

Success is no accident, and gratitude does not mean being naive. Gratitude is a celebration of the opportunities provided by others. It is respect for the uniqueness of the healthy human spirit and those who venture forth to make things happen in their world. These sorts of individuals have enabled me to come along for the ride, partake of their knowledge and be excited by their successes.

Early in my career as a newbie consultant, a seasoned pro said to me, "Our clients teach us everything we know." As that newly minted Ph.D. who thought he knew most everything, I had no idea how true that statement was until I was forced to confront my ignorance. Our clients have allowed me to practice my profession and make a contribution to their success. My privilege has been to learn at least as much from them as they have allowed me to share. Thank you.

*George E. Gercken*