

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

Paper Presented by

J. Robert Pritchard, Fellow

Mental and Physical Dilemma

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What would you do if tomorrow morning you were told that "you have a brain tumor growing at a rapid rate and that surgery is recommended immediately with a fifty-fifty chance for survival"?

I had that statement made to me over ten years ago and it very definitely changed my life and the lives of my family, friends, and employees.

In my particular case, I was one of those individuals who had for sixty years been without any major illness and had never been hospitalized. I lived life in a hurry, as most of us do, and thought illness was a problem that came to others. I never faced the fact that I was subject to physical problems the same as everyone else.

Starting in early 1974, I began to notice an inability to hear in my right ear during telephone conversations or when in a crowd. I was not really concerned as I was convinced that this was a natural problem of advancing age and that a hearing aid would correct the problem when needed. Adjustments were required and I made them. Later, in addition to the hearing loss, I began to notice an acute equilibrium problem which caused me to stumble and fall a few times when walking or turning sharply. Additionally, I began to notice a near collapse of my golf game. I'm sure that some people I know will challenge this last symptom by saying, "He never had a golf game to begin with!" But I knew better. There was something very definitely wrong with me and concern over this began to take charge of my thoughts.

At this stage, with the deep concern of my wife, family and friends, I decided to see a hearing specialist, Dr. James B. Touma.

During the next two months, on my visits to Dr. Touma, my hearing ability and equilibrium continued to deteriorate. I received all the normal hearing tests and examinations and was even placed in the hospital for extended x-rays and scans; and at their completion, no diagnosis of my problem could be confirmed.

I then decided to obtain other opinions: first at the Marshall University Hearing Clinic and then at the Charleston Eye and Ear Clinic, again without any significant results.

Procrastination now set in and I canceled my next two appointments with Dr. Touma. Dr. Touma, being a concerned and dedicated professional, contacted my wife and told her that he was of the opinion that my condition was more serious than I realized. He stated that he had performed all the tests available at his command. He suggested that he obtain an appointment for me with Dr. Ralph Caparosa at the University of Pittsburgh's Eye and Ear Clinic in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I had two other medical doctors, who were personal friends, check the credentials of Dr. Caparosa which confirmed Dr. Touma's statement that he was the best in the business.

The appointment was made and I went to Pittsburgh in October, 1974. On my visit with Dr. Caparosa all the same tests previously given plus many additional ones with more sophisticated equipment were made. He suggested that I be immediately admitted to the hospital. Of course this came as a shock to both my wife and myself, as I had made no plans to stay in Pittsburgh except for the day. But for the lack of a good excuse, I agreed and was admitted. Additional tests were given which included a myelogram; and on the following day a group of specialists, including Dr. Caparosa, met with my wife and myself for a consultation.

We were informed that I had a brain tumor which was approximately the size of a golf ball attached to my eighth brain nerve. Due to the rapid growth of the tumor as determined from Dr. Touma's charts which were available and tests made the previous day, it was recommended that I have immediate surgery. We were so upset that we asked for a day to recuperate from the shock and consider our problem. The next day we requested and received the same doctors for an additional discussion. I was concerned about the type of operation, its length, recovery period, etc.; but most important, the severity and the possibility of survival. We were told that my chances of survival were at best 50-50. I was further told that if a malignancy was found that the odds would be greatly reduced. I experienced the normal disbelief and shock. Some means of escape was my next thought. If I could just leave and forget the whole experience. I suppose at times such as this, we all try to run from trouble or say to ourselves that it is not true or that it will go away if we don't think about it.

All my life I had made the statement that life itself was just a long sequence of adjustments -- good and bad. The mark of a man is how he applies himself and adjusts. Now I had reached decision time and was forced to the test.

In a more sensible frame of mind, I talked to Dr. Caparosa concerning the urgency of the operation. I informed him that I had a wholly owned electrical contracting business and needed some time to put my house in order in every respect. I was told that an one month delay was the absolute maximum as the tumor was expanding rapidly and would soon effect my physical and mental capacities. I was discouraged and mentally depressed as we started the long trip home with one month to get my affairs in order. All the way home I prayed and made promises to the Lord if he would allow me to survive this crisis.

At this particular time my company, Pritchard Electric Company, Inc., of Huntington, West Virginia, had an one man management team consisting of myself and was involved in many large industrial projects.

I laid out a plan to get the job done as best I could in the time that had been allotted to me: first, to make an outline of what had to be done; and second, the proper sequence. I decided to use my tape recorder to communicate on all subject matter.

I had prided myself that I was one of those individuals who knew how to delegate responsibility in the operation of a company. Now, at this critical time, I realized that I had delegated only those things which I thought could be handled better by others rather than by myself. These turned out to be very few!

I had developed an excellent group of young, loyal and dedicated people to operate the company. The main emphasis being on four key people, an Executive Vice-President, a General Manager, a Vice-President of Operations and my wife. My wife had always been active in the company's operation and she needed very little assistance in the operation of our office, payroll, bookkeeping and accounting. I had an excellent accountant and attorney who were both personal friends and familiar with the company and my personal affairs. Therefore, I could put most of the emphasis on promotion, public relations, planning, and management of the company.

I started my tapes following the outline previously mentioned. They were separated according to topic; but more especially, they were directed to the individual who I thought could handle each particular phase of our operation. There was duplication to other employees to close communication gaps. All tapes were made in a manner so that this delegation of authority would not necessarily remain the same if I survived and was capable of continuing my management duties.

At this time our company had grown to be the major electrical contractor in our area. Most of our business was for major industrial customers such as Dupont, International Nickel, Ashland Oil, Dow Chemical, Stauffer Chemical, ARMO Steel, American Electric Power, Goodyear and many others.

In all cases, I had been the main contact representative and performed the public relations work. Most of our accounts were dependent upon certain individuals that I had personally cultivated over the years. On the tapes I divided the customers between the key employees -- selecting the employee that I thought would fit the personnel or particular type of work that was performed for a particular customer.

I provided one tape wherein I relayed the major responsibility of the total operation to one individual, he being the Executive Vice-President.

As we did a considerable amount of electrical line work, I made a special tape to our Vice-President of Operations, who had always handled estimating and management of all our line work, stating the existing customers' key contact people and some special items of interest and salesmanship to use when contacting them. I placed special emphasis on regular periodic contacts and the peculiarities and interest of those he would be dealing with. Other items on this tape concerned our line equipment maintenance and up-keep.

I made tapes of about ten minutes duration concerning every major customer. These tapes referred to the Chief Executive Officers and others in the companies, their hobbies, interests and what they liked to talk about -- sports, families or schools -- besides work. The approach of the true salesman as a public relations man was detailed.

I made tapes of shorter duration concerning many smaller accounts that were equally important -- emphasizing the same items as previously mentioned.

I made a special tape concerning one job that would eventually lose \$450,000. It needed all the attention at my command for obvious reasons.

As I had always handled all bonding and insurance requirements, I made a tape concerning these items with special reference as to the people to contact for advice, instruction and planning.

Tapes were made to my accountant and attorney which covered special items and appraised them of all the other tapes.

Tapes were made along the same line of thought concerning the following:

1. Taxes - Federal, State and Municipal -- emphasizing those that would require special attention.
2. Codes and Regulations - This covered our work in the various plants and other areas in which we conducted business.
3. Bidding - The system of applying overhead, direct job expenses, etc., the pitfalls of omission, the honesty and maintenance of bidding reputation.
4. NECA - Its place in our industry, the availability of information and service; old friends and associates and the importance of being active and involved -- make it better because you are a part of it.
5. I.B.E.W. - Recognizing that this organization is an important part of our industry; being firm when necessary but willing to make adjustments; be involved and strive to convince them of our partnership for the general benefit of all; be able to disagree without being disagreeable.
6. Safety - Complying with our safety program and that of others -- emphasizing the obligation to our employees and others by good safety and the tremendous savings of a good safety program.
7. Company Policy Manual - A thorough knowledge of policy in the approach to all problems, duties, obligations to our company, our customers, our employees and others. It is our rules and regulations for an efficient operation.

A special tape was made concerning management at various levels of construction -- stressing motivation and lines of communication.

There were tapes made to company individuals concerning their long lasting friendship and loyalty. These comments, at times, were very personal and emphasized "The Gentle Art of Caring". All management was appraised of the existence of these tapes.

Another tape was made concerning the history of our company: its goals and long range planning, its dedication to those who were responsible for its growth and success. This tape emphasized the "We or Us" aspect in lieu of the "I or Me" approach.

Another tape concerning how to be successful emphasized that the only thing we have to do as individuals is to conduct ourselves in a manner that will cause others to like us. Then the others will take care of the rest. Never forget that loyalty and honesty are up-front qualities followed by the ability to be tough but tender.

I also made a group of tapes to my loving wife and daughter. These tapes were of a rambling nature and were definitely the hardest for me to make. While making these tapes, I expressed my love and devotion to them and attempted to explain everything I had accomplished with the company was out of love for them. I touched on our financial planning for the family, my duties, dedication and obligations as a husband and father. In short, I tried to live the rest of my life, with my family, on those short sixty-minute tapes.

Even today, when I sit back and listen to these tapes, which are obviously sentimental to me, I listen to my thoughts and statements from that period in my life. Thoughts and statements that we should say more often but fail to do so.

In other tapes I discussed funeral arrangements (these will still come in handy at a future date) as well as my many civic, community, church, political and industrial activities.

At the end of one month, I had made the necessary adjustments in my mental attitude, made all the tapes I could think of, convinced myself that I would survive; and then having limited choices, I was on my way back to the University of Pittsburgh and was ready but not willing to proceed with the operation.

My wife and I spent some time discussing the operation with Dr. Caparosa and his staff -- how they intended to perform the operation, entrance into the skull and skull flaps, etc.

On November 7, 1974, the operation was performed. They had to remove my eighth brain nerve along with the tumor which was the size of a golf ball; but more importantly, it was benign. The post operation period went well with the exception of the first week. It was as if that week following the operation never existed in my life.

The surgery, although successful, did in fact leave me with a few problems which I have been able to compensate for: total hearing loss in my right ear, partial paralysis on the right side of my face, and some minor equilibrium problems -- all of which can be used to great advantage in my golf game.

The success of the operation has invalidated the tapes to some extent; but the fact that I made them, which points up the uncertainty of life, has changed me and the manner in which I operate as a manager.

The tapes that I made for my company employees and family are being utilized today; not by the employees but by me in my delegation of authority and responsibility, concern for others and dedication to my wife and family. This episode in my life has enhanced my whole being.

Life has been good to me ever since the operation. I am much wiser and have a more realistic approach to the continuation of my life and how I apply myself to that portion that still remains. I found that it still all gets done even if I do "Stop and smell the roses."