

A TRIBUTE TO DR. L.K. DORAISWAMY ON HIS SEVENTY FIFTH BIRTHDAY

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May 13, 2003, Pune

It is indeed a great privilege to be asked to pen a few remembrances on the occasion of LKD's 75th birthday.

It is indeed difficult to describe the many qualities that make this man. His stately demeanor, his outstanding credentials as a chemical engineering scientist, his distinguished leadership qualities and his impeccable writing style in English, all require pages to describe. His energy at the age of seventy five is enviable. The qualities that I have seen in LKD are incomparable and unsurpassed in anyone else I have known in my thirty years of professional life.

I have known LKD in four distinct phases of his and my life. I have been greatly enriched as a person by every encounter with him.

I met LKD for the first time in 1973-74, when I was a young man of 27, beginning my research career in India at IPCL, Vadodara. LKD was then an advisor to IPCL for setting up the R&D Center at IPCL. I participated in several meetings with LKD in planning the R&D activities at IPCL. It is appropriate to say that he initiated me into this profession. I was impressed with his vast erudition and breadth of knowledge. He instantly became my role model.

Between 1974-78, NCL and IPCL worked on a project together to develop a process of acrylate esters. Much of the work was done in the Chemical Engineering and Process Development Division of NCL of which LKD was the Head at that time. I was nominated by IPCL to work on this process which led to my long months of stay NCL during that period. I recall the morning "tea and vada" sessions where the entire Division got together with LKD for an informal half an hour. At this time I learnt my second lesson from him. Good leadership requires effective communication and listening skills and being accessible to all colleagues. The daily morning half an hour was LKD's way of emotional bonding with his colleagues and gently prodding them to give their best in every endeavor.

In 1987-88, LKD persuaded me to come to NCL as Head of the Polymer Chemistry Division. It took me a year and half to decide to make the change. Once I arrived at NCL, he made me instantly comfortable. The transition was so smooth that I was really amazed. For the first time, I experienced the galaxy of scientific leadership at NCL. Being amongst such a peer group was both an opportunity and challenge. Herein I

learnt the third lesson from LKD. If you want to build a world class organization, attract talented individuals, give them leadership roles and set them free from the shackles of command and control. LKD recognized the potentials in the people whom he hired long before any one else recognized it. He gave them space to grow. A true leader is never insecure. As LKD often used to remark, his job as a Director of NCL was only to find competent men and women who have the potential to outshine him, nourish them and leave them alone to do their job.

In 1989, I saw LKD retire after a distinguished decade of leadership to NCL. He quietly slipped away from the scene. He often used to say that he did not wish to stay on at NCL Campus, one extra day as Ex-Director. He felt that his presence will interfere with the working of the next Director, giving a feeling as if he was being looked over his shoulders. This was the fourth lesson I learnt from him. When your job is done, fade away gracefully, pick up another career or interest and begin life anew. Learn to relinquish the trappings of power and renounce the authority which comes only with a chair. The true mark of respect for an individual is seen only when he is stripped of these external embellishments.

LKD has inspired many generations of professionals in this country. By his life and work he created at NCL a compelling desire for excellence. His definition of excellence was all pervasive, not just limited to the scientific work, but also for the manner the gardens were maintained, the cleanliness of the laboratory and its surroundings, the quality of life in the colony etc. His New Year letters to the staff were inspiring and works of literature by themselves.

I wish to offer my salutations to this great man. Happy birthday LKD! Many more happy and healthy returns of the day.