

*Society of Plastics Engineers –  
Automotive Division  
Lifetime Leadership Achievement Award*

“Lessons from a Lifetime of Learning”

SPE Awards Night Dinner

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Detroit, Michigan

(Introduction by Fred Deans, Chairman, Society of Plastics Engineers - Automotive Division.)

Thank you, Fred, for that kind introduction. I am delighted to be here this evening and proud to accept this award. Your organization does good work.

I'd like to thank the entire SPE Automotive Division Board for giving me the great honor to be first recipient of the "Lifetime Leadership Achievement Award" - especially because the Board represents the voice of thousands of members. Your recognition means a lot to me, and a lot to Delphi.

It's a little humbling to be at the point in my career where I'm even considered for a "lifetime achievement" award! As Kirk Douglas said when he won a Lifetime Achievement award at the Kennedy Center last year...I'm a little too young for this!

But I've been in the car and truck business for, perhaps, twice as long as many of you. Actually, this is my fortieth year – and I still love it!

I'm on my eighth automotive recession...so I feel like I qualify as a survivor! I'd like to tell you that it's easier the eighth time around. It's *not!*

But, I have learned that once you go through a challenge like this recession, you learn how to prepare for tough times...and, to use them as an opportunity to change your business for the better and prepare for the inevitable upturn.

This is just one of the lessons I've learned during my time in the auto business. I like to think that instead of making me into a "fossil," the experience I've gained has helped me learn a few other things you may find interesting. I've found them to be especially useful in my role as a leader. So, here are some of "J.T.'s Personal International Lessons on Leadership..."

First, there is an old African saying that says, "Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." Everyone in our industry, it seems, is navigating some pretty rough waters these days. But I'm a firm believer that some of the hardest things we ever have to do, or learn, will serve us best.

I think back to some of the times we faced during the 1970's and 80's...when new global competitors appeared on the horizon and took better advantage of situations such as the Oil Crisis. Those were difficult days, and some in our industry – including some of the biggest players – came pretty close to the brink of disaster.

But as bad as things got, the intensified competition from around the world made our industry and our company better. It forced our entire U.S. industry to

think differently about our business...to become more responsive to our customers and – most importantly – to become more innovative in developing products and managing our operations.

Tough global competition also brought about fundamental changes to our business that seem practically “old-school” today. Think about Lean manufacturing and our drive for faster time-to-market...an enhanced focus on occupant safety and vehicle reliability...a greater emphasis on fuel economy and protecting our environment...all of these were fostered by the hard competitive times we faced in the past 20 years.

So, even though this current recession won't be easy, it will force us to get creative in order to survive...to be innovative as we work to keep our businesses strong and profitable.

I believe people in automotive plastics – like many of us in this room – are especially well-poised to drive that innovative thinking...to continually boost safety, fuel economy and value in the vehicles we help produce. And, I urge you to take advantage of the many programs SPE offers that will help nurture that innovation.

Lesson Number Two comes from China, where they say, “Ten fingers all have different lengths...”

The translation of that saying is that each of ten fingers has a very different job...a different reason for being useful. For example, your thumb can be used to hitch a ride...your index finger can show someone directions or emphasize a point...and your ring finger often wears a sign of commitment to another person.

The point is, each of those ten fingers can do something very interesting, or unusual, or practical on its own.

The lesson is that each of us is very different, and we should value that. Within Delphi, for instance, we are proud of the diversity of our workforce, and our board of directors. And I can testify that, as the industry – and Delphi – have become more diverse...we have become much stronger.

But there's something else leaders can take away from this lesson, too. The real magic of ten fingers is when they come together for a common task. It may be to shake hands, to guide a child, to wave hello, or to simply steady oneself from a fall. There are many times when we, too, come together for a common task – it's called teamwork. So while we must prize individualism – like the ten fingers – we should also work hard on striking the balance between individualism and teamwork.

As leaders, we should remember that we grow so much more as individuals when we find ways to bring someone else along for the ride...another person or group who can grow along with us. When we are charged to serve as leaders, we must take ownership of the task of building our team...while remembering to value every individual on that team.

Lesson Number Three is based on a Native American proverb, which says, "There is no power – only responsibility." This means that, as leaders, we don't just have authority – we are also accountable for – and *to* – the people and organizations under our watch. This is a very hard lesson for leaders to learn – but without it, we are not leaders.

Over the years, one of the most important things I've learned is that I cannot rely on those I lead...unless they know they can rely on me. I must not only ask for their support – I must also give them my support. And, I have also learned that I cannot expect more of my people than I expect of myself. I give it my all, and my team does the same.

As leaders, we are in a position to make or influence great and small decisions every day, and that is a huge responsibility. We are visible. People inside – and outside – our companies watch what we say and do, so we must embody these qualities through our own words and behaviors.

This is true in our professional associations as well as in our businesses. There are certainly many opportunities to expand the knowledge base and elevate professional standards within automotive plastics through SPE. I hope you continue to apply your leadership and insight for the benefit of our industry as a whole.

And, I also encourage you to look around your community for opportunities to make a difference, because I know how rewarding it has been for me...and how much it has truly helped me grow in my ability to handle greater challenges.

Perhaps you can help ignite a love of science in a young student...share your passion for innovation with a cultural organization...or lend your leadership skills to help people who have difficulty helping themselves.

But whatever you do, remember that leadership and responsibility go hand-in-hand. And never forget that one of the greatest legacies you can leave...is to have inspired and influenced a future leader.

Lesson Number Four is based on an old German proverb that says, "Never give advice unless asked." I think I've done enough of that here this evening! But, in closing, let me leave you with one final lesson. This one is not based on any particular proverb, but on the work of one of Detroit's own...the

award-winning Mitch Albom. In Mitch's book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the key message is – strike a balance with your time.

All of us work hard. Our precious time always seems to be in demand. What is really important, as we sort through the requests that come our way, is the attitude we take towards our time. We need to make sure that each day contains a balance between work, and the other people and activities that matter most to us – and that our work embodies who we are as individuals. I am very fortunate because, when I work, I'm myself – and my work represents who I truly am. Learning to strike this balance can be very difficult, but it has the potential to enrich every aspect of our lives – especially as we grow in our responsibilities as leaders.

Once again, I am truly touched by the honor SPE has given me this evening, as well as the chance to share some of what life has taught me. Thank you very much.

