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09/05/2016

Thanks EMC!

Just about 19 years ago, I pulled into the yard at Tresca Brothers and asked my dispatcher if I should wash out for the day. He said "No. One more up front" meaning I had another load to deliver and that I should get it from the Central mix (basically an enormous spinning cylinder that mixes cement, stone, sand with the appropriate amount of water to make concrete). After rinsing the back of the truck off, I walked into the front office and the dispatcher (Kenny) asked me "Have you been up to the big job in Franklin yet?". I said "nope", he said "ok, 495 south to King st, right at the bottom of the ramp, first left, then first right, you can't miss it.

At the time I'd been driving a concrete mixer for about three years. During this time I'd seen some massive construction sites but they all paled in comparison to what I saw as I turned onto Constitution Blvd and got my first look at the big job. There were literally dozens of crews working on these enormous 15'x15'x4' footings. As soon as I pulled onto the work site, a string of workers guided me to a particular footing and then another group of workers took over and told me to blast the entire load right in. The work crews all exhibited a sense of urgency that was demonstrated by their pace. I even heard mention of a bonus "if they could get the job completed early", but this might only have been a rumor... In any case, I quickly followed their instructions and as soon as I was done they told me to pull out and started lining another truck up to top off the footing. As I drove to the washout area I was awestruck by the hundreds of other footings that had already been poured and stretched out before me in a vast grid that was too big to fully appreciate in the dusky light of late evening.

As I washed out my truck, another driver (Ronnie) pulled up next to me and with a big smile said "quite a job, huh?" I said "Yeah! This building is going to be fucking huge! Do you know what's it going to be used for?" He said "Yeah it's for EMC, my wife works for them. They make these big refrigerator sized boxes that are used by computers to store data". I said "what, like a big hard drive?" He said "Yeah, I guess?" And then a little twinkle appeared in his eye and he asked "Hey, you're into computers, right?" I said "Yeah", he said "They're hiring entry level people right now, I might be able to get you an interview if you want". I said "Sure!" all the while thinking "He's so full of shit". But playing along, I sent him my resume which, outside of the computer programming classes I had taken, had no relevance to the job I was applying for. Much to my surprise, about a week later EMC called me and asked me to come in for an interview.

I showed up to my interview wearing the suit I had gotten married in six months earlier (it was the only one I owned). I was terrified, I'd never been in a call center before and was intimidated by the fact that everyone had two monitors going. I ended up being interviewed by three people that afternoon; Kevin Kelly, Paul Porier and Brian Kling. I only really remember sweating profusely and Paul advising me to wipe my upper lip when he had finished his interview. I also seem to recall that they were all very nice and kept asking me if I could "multitask". I had no idea what they were talking about but said "Yeah! No problem! I multitask all the time...". After the interviews, as Kevin walked me out, I took a good look around because I was pretty sure I wouldn't be back.

That night I prepared a "thank you for the interview, I'd really like to work there even though I'm completely unqualified" letter and mailed it the next day. After waiting for a couple of weeks and not hearing anything, I called Kevin and after a bit of back and forth we eventually connected. I took the call in the cab of my mixer in the middle of Watertown, I remember shutting off the engine before calling because I didn't want to remind him who my current employer was. After exchanging pleasantries he said "I can make you an offer but I can only do \$15 an hour (\$30k/year). I was bummed because this was a 25%+ cut in pay but said I would get back to him with an answer. After discussing it with my wife Karen, we decided to go for it and figure out how to make the finances work later. In advance of my actual start date, I spent hours teaching myself how to type and showed up for my new job as a Customer Support Technician (CST) on November 2, 1997 in a new Khakis (one of my first pairs).

At the time, EMC was booming. The stock was well on its way toward becoming the best performing stock of the 1990's and seemingly everyone who had been there for any length of time was a millionaire (at least on paper). On top of this, I was blessed to work for two incredible people, Paul Grasso and Christine Lundberg. Together they showed me through example what it meant to take ownership of a problem and held everyone to a high standard (one that they consistently met themselves). Initially I thought it was just them but many of the senior executives also demonstrated the same behavior. My favorite example of this was the day I walked into the PSE lab at 171 and noticed that Frank Hauck (who was running Customer Service at the time) standing behind a PSE who was dialed into an array that was involved in some kind of DU/DL situation. I asked one of the guys what he was doing and he said he's been standing there since yesterday morning (30+ hours at that point) waiting to find out what happened and making sure we stay focused on the issue. Initially this blew me away, but over the years I would come to understand that this was just part of EMC's DNA, as was the saying "Guilty until proven innocent".

There are many other examples of people going above and beyond but what I really loved most about EMC at the time were the opportunities. It was generally understood that if you worked hard and did a good job, you were going places and there were scores of examples of people who started out in the same position as I and had gone on to very successful careers. Roger Pepper and Lenny Linkens Jr, were two examples that I thought of frequently back then.

Well, I wanted a piece of the action and took advantage of every opportunity that came my way. Nothing was going to stop me and as a result along the way I've been called ambitious and much worse. What they didn't understand was back then I was dealing with the constant fear that someone would eventually figure out that I had no business being there and would sooner or later hand me a broom and ask me to empty the trash (on slow days this was part of my old job at Tresca). Every time I took a call or dialed into a box I was grateful that I didn't have to spend another winter chipping concrete off the inside of a cement mixer in order to avoid being laid off. Being cold sucks and fear of it is a great motivator.

That was 19 years ago. I happily started in the bottom 100 and now as a TD I'll wrap up my time at EMC somewhere near the top 100 (technical) well at least in

my BU, there's less than 20 of us! :-)) While I worked very hard, put in the hours and am very proud of my accomplishments, I need to point out that I didn't get here on my own and that's really what this blog post is about. I wanted to celebrate the people that helped me and perhaps many others at EMC. Starting with my wife's unfailing belief and then Kevin Kelly (who I cannot thank enough for the opportunity) dozens of people demonstrated what made EMC a great place to work and encouraged me along the way. These people include:

- Dale Hoopingarner - who gave me my first official attaboy
- Jim Houlick and Jerry O'Leary - who brought me into their team as a CSE and supported my dream to become a PSE
- John Bauer - who encouraged me to take responsibility for any cases related to the new "PITA" Connectrix product
- John Adolf - who hired me into TS to support the new PITA Connectrix product
- Kevin Buchanan, Bill Thibodeau, Ed Cote, Tim Applegate, Ann Fitzpatrick, Wendy Wolf, Jack Hinkle, Kevin Bujold - for being great mentors
- Gary Hirbour - for helping to keep my ego in check, an impossible task back in the day
- Judy Capra - I can't even fully comprehend the impact she had on me personally and professionally
- John Petercuskie - a great role model for dealing with difficult customer situations
- Kieran Desmond - for insisting that I help write Fibre Channel uncovered
- Jerry Rhoton - for insisting that I solve a particular customer problem even though it wasn't my product
- Oz Garinkol - for asking the question "what are you going to do next", which caused me to spend the next 10 years getting my EE from Northeastern
- Vin Mains - for the primary and secondary reasons
- Doug Fierro - for demonstrating what integrity means even when it's inconvenient for you personally and for the two rules to being a good manager
- Mike Sheets - for sharing his insights and experience regarding management and demonstrating how to walk your own path
- Mark Lippitt - for showing me what it means to be an Engineer
- David Black - for the opportunity to participate in T11 and the mentoring
- Dave Cohen - for all of the LINKS and helping me to appreciate the value of sweating the details
- Pat Mullaney - for patience and exposing me to the inner workings of Network Virtualization, Linux and PXE
- Tony Rodrigues - for critical thinking without being critical
- Jack Harwood - for persistence
- Dave Noon - for cooperation
- John Madden - for demonstrating the value of being outspoken
- Radia Perlman - for demonstrating how to present extremely complex topics in a way that makes it possible for the rest of us to understand and for showing that it's ok to ask basic questions
- Stephen Manley - for honest feedback delivered with compassion and more importantly humor

- Jeff Bettencourt (and Doug Fierro again) - For supporting this OSIM idea we're calling ZTIP
- and my Team; Jean Pierre, Alan Rajapa and Massarra Tannous - for translating my vague and sometimes conflicting ideas into something that is actually useful and also for making work a joy.

These are some of the incredible people that made EMC what it is today and I think their behavior reflects not only their personal beliefs but the collective beliefs of the company we all helped to build. These beliefs are part of what many of us will carry with us as we transition to DELL | EMC on September 7th. Like the early days of EMC, I see nothing but opportunities for those who want to dig in and get their hands dirty.

All of that said, I suppose given the magnitude of the change we're about to experience, it's only natural to reflect on what the legacy of EMC will be, because on September 7th it ceases to exist as a standalone company and inevitably some of what EMC is will be lost when that happens. For me this legacy breaks down into four things that I'll always carry with me:

1. Do not be afraid of change or hard times, this is when maximum growth happens,
2. Diversity of all kinds (including in my case, education/background) breeds creativity,
3. Do not let a person's (or your own) past blind you to where they (you) are going, and
4. Take a chance on someone, and when you do, choose someone who feels like they have something to prove, there is no better fuel than the chip we carry on our shoulders.

Farewell EMC and hello DELL | EMC!

Thanks for reading!

Posted at 05:45 PM | [Permalink](#)



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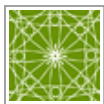
Erik, You never cease to amaze me. Knowing you and many of your mentors made my 15 years at EMC a remarkable and awesome experience. EMC has always had the most devoted and intelligent people in the industry. Although I am now enjoying retirement, I think fondly of my former colleagues, especially you!

Posted by: Roseanne Ouellette | [09/05/2016 at 07:19 PM](#)



A true inspiring story of patience, dedication and hardwork. Thanks Erik for sharing! When I was in EMC, you inspired me grow in my career and helped me pushed to produce that 111 page of FCoE Troubleshooting section. :-)

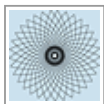
Posted by: Mark De Castro | [09/05/2016 at 11:42 PM](#)



Outstanding post Erik. You did very well with EMC, and demonstrated true leadership showing anybody that would observe, the "right" way to work. The "old days" sure were fun, and one helluva learning experience.

Many of the lessons from those days are carried with us today. They apply to whatever we are doing today.

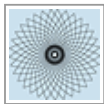
Posted by: [Brian Kling](#) | [09/06/2016 at 09:30 AM](#)



Thanks Roseanne! I frequently wish you were still around to pester with questions but I'm glad you're enjoying retirement!

Erik

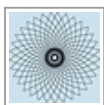
Posted by: [Erik Smith](#) | [09/06/2016 at 10:17 AM](#)



Hey Mark! That troubleshooting section was a ton of work and it's still a great resource. I'm glad I was able to help!

Erik

Posted by: [Erik Smith](#) | [09/06/2016 at 10:19 AM](#)



Thanks Brian! Those were some great times. It's hard to believe that the little baby I used to bring into the CST lab is now a Sophomore at Suffolk!

Erik

Posted by: [Erik Smith](#) | [09/06/2016 at 10:22 AM](#)

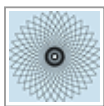


Hey Erik,

That was a fun read. Gratitude is often in short supply. It does you proud. I always enjoyed our time working together. I still recall the day Ed Cote told me there was some guy in Customer Service who was debugging the Conectrix dial home server. Your engineering work in Customer Service was a big part of making Connectrix's first year of business a hockey stick.

Mark

Posted by: [Mark Lippitt](#) | [09/06/2016 at 04:07 PM](#)



Thanks Mark! I remember that! ...and the long drive up to 228 to meet with you and Erez to make my case for including EMCRemote on the Connectrix service processor. Good times! Connectrix was your baby, I was just happy to be along for the ride! :-)

Posted by: [Erik Smith](#) | [09/06/2016 at 05:23 PM](#)



Well written Erik

Though we have not had a chance to work a lot together at EMC I know we will have a chance to do so with NVMe and NVMf. Good luck to all with Dell | EMC

Amnon Izhar

Posted by: Amnon | [09/06/2016 at 09:30 PM](#)



If you need my help to update it, I am always here to rejoin your team :-)

Posted by: Mark De Castro | [09/07/2016 at 10:01 PM](#)



Hello Erik,

This was an inspiring read. You are most hard working person I have know, who is always willing to help with a smile. Kudos!

Working with you was always a pleasure.

I fondly remember our time working together.

All the best with the new chapter of Dell|EMC

-Mugdha

Posted by: Mugdha Kulkarni | [09/08/2016 at 12:37 AM](#)



Eric,

great article a real trip down memory lane, and looking forward to great things to come.

Dave O'...

Posted by: Dave O'Donoghue | [09/08/2016 at 02:34 PM](#)

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