

Always looking to improve things is fun

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Summary

The title of this talk is a direct plagiarizing of the title of an interview of Rodney Calvert, published in the CSEG Recorder (2006). Typical of Rodney, the words in that phrase he expressed during that interview -- always ... looking ... improve ... things ... fun -- individually and in aggregate capture his message succinctly, just as they capture so well the essence of this geophysicist gentleman, this gentle man of geophysics.

We could start with any of the words in the title; consider first “looking.” Rodney’s curiosity about why and how things work was nonstop. He saw issues in exploration geophysics -- and beyond -- that others hadn’t noticed or might have been perplexed by, and soon applied his keen understanding of and insight into physics toward devising possible solutions. Problems, scientific and otherwise, that might not even catch someone else’s attention as possibly benefiting from thoughtful scientific examination, were targets of Rodney’s keen eye and curiosity -- “always” on the lookout, and so often on target with practical solutions.

Rodney overtly cared about the world and people, leading him to be ever on the lookout to “improve” things. The only business as usual for him would be well beyond the usual for others. Being eminently practical in his outlook, he applied his depth of understanding in physics, signal processing, and science in general to seek and often find practical solutions to practical problems, the “things” in life. This was exemplified not only in his scientific approach to problems but also in steps he at times felt impelled to take to circumvent managerial impediments that might otherwise have stalled an effort to solve a problem.

A driver throughout his approach to always looking for, identifying, and tackling problems worth addressing was the “fun” that he had with all this, indeed with life in general. No loner in his approach, his enthusiasm and joy in the common pursuit of understanding could affect enthusiasm in his collaborators.

These personal impressions are based on observations at a distance since I have not had the good fortune of working directly with Rodney, whose career-long professional home was in Shell. For reasons that I aim to share in this talk, Rodney nevertheless drew my intense respect and admiration over several decades.