TRIBUTE

Paul LaCelle: ‘Contribute or Make Trouble’

When Paul LaCelle first recruited me to Rochester, he provided me with far more support than a lowly postdoc had any right to expect. Then he insisted that I publish independently of him, sacrificing his own career in favor of mine. This sort of thing happened over and over again, not just in my own experience, but for many others. A Medical Center faculty member for more than 40 years, Paul was always more interested in helping someone else succeed than in seeking accolades for himself. He died March 9 at age 82.

Paul was enormously talented intellectually, but so humble that you hardly knew it. One of the early pioneers in trying to understand the role of blood cell deformability in clinical pathology, he was interested not just in the biophysical properties of the cells, although he was a great fan of physics and physicists in general. Rather, he focused on the role that mechanics played in the pathophysiology of diseases related to red cell and white cell abnormalities, and how these abnormalities got in the way of blood flow and oxygen delivery.

In the latter part of his career, his main focus was administration, and he led the Department of Biophysics through a number of difficult but important transitions in the 1980s and 1990s. Later he contributed to the University as associate dean for graduate education in the medical school, a role where he had the opportunity to indulge his passion for fostering and promoting the careers of young scientists.

Paul had a great laconic wit. On one occasion (it must have been a particularly bad day in the chairman’s office) he advised me, “If you ever think about becoming a chairman, you should take three months off and get some therapy.” Even in the last stages of his illness, reflecting on careers, he commented, “It’s good to either contribute or make trouble.”

His passion for excellence and the attention and care he gave to those around him made him a truly exceptional individual, one who contributed a great deal to the University and to the community at large.

I owe him a great debt personally, and we all miss him dearly.

—Richard Waugh

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