

# Thank you, Bill Hewlett

**I**T WAS A SIMPLE DEAL. If my next report card had a B average, my parents would give me a trip or two weeks at summer camp. My grandfather suggested New York City where I could see Mickey Mantle (his hero) play at Yankee Stadium. My mother liked Yellowstone National Park,

and my dad came up with Washington, DC, or sailing around Mackinac Island. I wasn't interested in summer camp, and I didn't want to go to any of these places.

It's not that I was being intentionally difficult or oppositional. I wasn't. I knew exactly where I wanted to go: 1501 Page Mill Road in Palo Alto, California, the home of Hewlett-Packard—the only place I really wanted to see because it was there that the company actually designed and built all their great stuff and then wrote it up in the *HP Journal*. And maybe, just maybe, if I was incredibly lucky, I'd get to meet my hero, Bill Hewlett. Wow.

I never made the trip. I did poorly in Math (C-) and flat-out flunked science class, so I didn't get to meet him. Now, his recent passing makes me wonder how meeting him then would have affected me. It couldn't have been anything but positive.

Bill Hewlett was the essence of greatness in every sense of the word. He lived a professional and personal life of sterling, uncorrupted excellence. Given his character, it seems reasonable that Hewlett-Packard became not just a great company but a national treasure. The breadth and depth of HP product innovation during Bill's tenure is without parallel. The "HP Contribution" was not a vacuous corporate slogan. He would not build a product unless it offered genuine advancement. One could only marvel at the sheer engineering horsepower and the utter finesse of a

Hewlett-Packard product.

The management structure Bill and his buddy Dave Packard put in place was equally rigorous and startling. Individual respect and trust, generous leave and medical benefits, profit sharing, employee stock ownership, and other similar benefits were radical notions more than 40 years ago. Characteristically, Hewlett felt his most significant accomplishment was that the management values instilled in HP permitted the company to prosper without him.

Such exceptional professional accomplishment could come only from an exemplary set of personal values. More than anything, Bill Hewlett was a gentleman. His integrity and sense of ethics was flawless. He once settled a patent issue without lawyers—only an apology, a handshake, and a check. He understood wealth and never allowed it to define him. He lived quietly, with no interest in constructing badges or displays. He built hospitals. In a world full of pretentious disappointments, he quietly stood out as everything a public figure can and should be. He was a great man.

Bill Hewlett was the very best that engineering and humanity has to offer. The contribution is incomparable; the loss, incalculable. Thank you, Bill Hewlett, for all that you did and all that you were.

**Hands-on management the HP way. Hewlett (center) discusses an instrument's innards with two engineers at YHP, HP's Japanese operation (1963) (courtesy Agilent Technologies).**



**HP's first product, an audio oscillator, derived directly from Hewlett's master's thesis. It provided a direction, methods, and standards that are reflected in HP and Agilent products to this day.**



**Hewlett (center), Packard (left), and Bill Gates (right) at Stanford University in 1996. Hewlett built numerous buildings for his and others' alma maters but would not allow his name to appear on any (courtesy Stanford University).**