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Judy Arluck Reflects on Five Years of Working for Bill Hewlett

In an article for a Components Group newsletter on her years providing administrative support for Bill Hewlett, Executive Assistant Judy Arluck provides a rare glimpse into Bill Hewlett -- the man and the manager.



In honor of Mr. Hewlett's 86th birthday this month, Judy has agreed to share her insights with Labs' employees. Reprinted by permission is an excerpt of her article that appeared in the March 1999 issue of "Admin Connection."

In this 60th anniversary year of the company, I can look back on the almost 5 years (Nov. 1993-Sept. 1998) I worked for Bill Hewlett, as his Executive Assistant, as a very special time. He is probably one of the most interesting and extraordinary people I have ever met, let alone worked with -- and also one of the nicest. He said that he and Mr. Packard always felt that employees were their most important product.

The most surprising and delightful thing about working with Mr. Hewlett was finding out what a great sense of humor he has. He loved puns and jokes -- the worse the pun, the better! If he could make you moan and groan at them, the better he liked it!

I am not surprised he and Mr. Packard are considered to be two of the greatest entrepreneurs in the 20th century, a description I don't doubt at all. I had occasion to ask Mr. Hewlett exactly when he and Mr. Packard met. After thinking about it, he said, with a smile, "1933." So this means they were friends for over 63 years - quite a landmark. I was fortunate enough to be around Mr. Packard for 2-1/2 years before he passed away on March 26, 1996. To see them together was to realize they were not just co-founders or co-owners of HP - but they were true friends. The last time I saw Mr. Packard was when I sat with him and Mr. Hewlett at the HP Shareholders' Meeting in February 1996, at the Cupertino site. He was very gracious and friendly, and as I sat listening to them talk, I was struck again by how down-to-earth both of them were.

At a tree-planting ceremony in Mr. Packard's memory a few months later, Mr. Hewlett spoke a few words to the employees assembled, then we attended a reception afterward. I was amazed, but not surprised, when Mr. Hewlett insisted on staying until the last person who lined up to meet him was gone. We had only planned to be there for 20 minutes; we were there for almost an hour-and-a-half! When we headed back to the car, Mr. Hewlett seemed amazed at the number of people who stood in line to meet him, shake his hand, or have their picture taken with him. I asked him, "Don't you realize how many employees respect you, have great affection for you, and admire you so much?" He seemed surprised, answering, "I retired from the company in 1987 and haven't been involved with the day-to-day running of the company since then." He proudly pointed out he had met an employee that day who'd worked for the company for only one week and another who had worked for the company for 30 years!

He was always very respectful of other people's customs and cultures, and I respected him a lot for that and could see that it was very genuine. He made me feel as though I was his equal - not he was my equal. He made me feel as though my opinion was important and worthwhile and what I thought really mattered to him. It is very flattering to be around someone like this.

During the time I worked for him there were many company policies introduced. One day when I was driving him on an errand, he suddenly turned to me and asked me what I thought about a particular policy/program. It startled me so much, I blurted out, "Do you want my opinion, or do you want the "company line?" He quietly said, "Your opinion," and I could tell he really meant it. I told him I thought

the policy didn't take into account employees who made only \$7-10/hour who didn't have expense accounts, company cars or stock options. Or who might be single parents having a hard time just supporting their families or taking care of elderly relatives, etc. He asked me to explain my viewpoint and I did. My mom always taught me to stand up for what I believe in. He agreed with me and said the company should be addressing those issues I'd brought up.

He allowed me to ask him many questions - in essence, he was my "Answer Man" and I enjoyed being able to talk to him about people in the newspapers, magazines or television or even HP news and business. He never made me feel I was being too inquisitive or intrusive.

When a person from the Facilities department came upstairs with a proposal to remodel Mr. Hewlett's and Mr. Packard's offices (Mr. Packard was still alive then), he told me how much it would cost, how long it would take, how they would do it on weekends so it wouldn't interfere with their calendars, etc., and that the furniture would be from Corporate Headquarters in Bldg. 20, so it wouldn't be "new." I asked him if he wanted me to set up an appointment for him to present this to Mr. Hewlett in person. He declined, which surprised me, because I didn't meet many people who turned down a chance to meet Mr. Hewlett in person. The next time Mr. Hewlett was in the office, he very patiently listened to me telling him how much it would cost, how long it would take, etc., etc. I ended up by asking, "So what do you think, Mr. Hewlett?" He glanced around Mr. Packard's office and he looked around his office and finally said: "Please tell them I don't think the company should spend money remodeling the offices of two people who do not contribute to the daily profit of the company." This is what I came to describe as a "typical" Mr. Hewlett answer: concise, to the point and it got right to the heart of the matter.

He had what he called a "One Page Rule," where a memo or letter should be limited to one page, if possible, and always include a: 1) beginning, 2) a middle, and 3) an end. He also felt that any correspondence should be able to be picked up months or years later and still be understood completely; in other words, spell out abbreviations and people's full names, etc. He said he also would be considered "old-fashioned," but felt that HP, and perhaps other companies, had "too many" meetings. He said there were meetings to talk about what happened at the previous meeting and meetings to talk about what was going to happen in the next meeting! He said people used to just meet face-to-face at the coffee stations and settle issues.

Also, he was a stickler about punctuality: he felt being on time for an appointment was very important.

He believed in the "Human Side of Management," which was from a speech he delivered at the University of Notre Dame in 1982. He truly believed that all employees should be treated with dignity and respect and would have been upset to think this may not have been happening with all employees. Another quote from this speech is: "You simply cannot run an operation and assume that everything is perfect." People may not realize that he wrote all of his own speeches and didn't use a speechwriter.

I've been lucky enough to get my "profit sharing" handshake from Mr. Hewlett for the past five years. The first time I extended my hand and said I wanted to thank him, he asked, "What for?" I said, "For my profit sharing check." He quickly withdrew his hand and said, "But I had nothing to do with that." I quickly replied, "Mr. Hewlett, you and Mr. Packard had everything to do with it, because if it weren't for you two, there wouldn't be any profit sharing program." He then shrugged, nodded, and stuck his hand out while I thanked him again. I also told him I was the proxy or stand-in for all the thousands of HP employees who would have liked to get their profit sharing handshake from him, too!

Bill Hewlett was a kind man, a smart man, and a wonderful manager and a joy to work with. After he hired me, I told him I always felt like I was working for him and Mr. Packard anyway. I never dreamed in a million years I'd be working for him directly! I was proud to have worked with this man who gave me his trust, respect, and friendship - and who really gave me much, much more - a truly remarkable and unforgettable working experience.

Judy Arluck is an Executive Assistant reporting to Colin Chin, VP, Components Group Worldwide Sales & Marketing. She has been employed at HP for 18-1/2 years moving within the HP community often. She has worked in eight different HP buildings (at Corporate four different times). Her HP career includes supporting Bill Hewlett as his Executive Assistant from 1993 through 1998. She feels that Admins are some of the most important people in any company. Judy's hobbies/interests are reading, movie buff, watching sports (she has been an amateur boxing judge for the past 10 years). Her favorite quote is, "You will never be sorry you were nice to someone," Author: Judy's mother.

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