

Roy Williams as recalled by his son and family —

Or: Roy Williams: A leader among many (title as it appeared *The Oak Ridger*)

The rewards for writing stories about Y-12 history come in many and varied forms! However, the e-mail that arrived Saturday evening and followed up by another early on Sunday morning may be the most endearing rewards yet! Roy Williams' daughter-in-law sent the first e-mail and his son sent the second.

Toni Williams said in her e-mail, "My husband and I happened to be in Oak ridge on Friday! I have not been there in eight or nine years." She continued to state the reason they were in Oak Ridge on this occasion and then said, "I casually picked up *The Oak Ridger* and there on the Opinion page was your article about my wonderful father-in-law, Roy Delmer Williams."

Her e-mail went on to say they appreciated the article and purchased extra copies of the newspaper to send to their son, John, who is a senior at The Citadell. John had spoken at his grandfather's funeral! She also mentioned that several Y-12 retirees had attended Roy's funeral.

She concluded by suggesting I contact her husband, Walter Roy Williams, for more information, which I immediately did! And am I glad I did! Walt's insights into his dad's life are what I want to share with you now.

Walt began by saying just what you would expect, "...the work that is done at Y-12 has always been highly classified, so Dad never discussed any specifics about the initiatives that were undertaken in defense of our country or his role in them...I can tell you, however, that he took his responsibilities very seriously and gave everything he had to making their efforts a success."

Walt went on to say, "Dad always thought that the real key to success at Y-12 was the people that worked there! He told me on more than one occasion that their employees were dedicated patriots that wanted to do the job right! He always said that the building could burn down tomorrow but if he still had his people, they could rebuild the operation in a month or two better than ever! He believed strongly that there was nothing those people could not do, no matter how difficult the task."

He said that of all his Dad's accomplishments, he was proudest of the people that he promoted to assume additional responsibility! Walt observed, "He spent the majority of his time building a world class team and then 'managing by wandering around.' He was trying to 'catch people doing something right' that he could publicly praise and then leverage those best practices elsewhere in the operation."

Of Roy's attention to detail, Walt confirmed what we who knew him already knew by saying, "There was no detail – no matter how small – that escaped his attention! He felt strongly that if you take care of the small details, the big issues would be less urgent and more manageable." What a great philosophy, huh!

Walt observed, "He was the same way in his personal life and his dealings with me and our family! Those who know Dad will remember that he took thorough process and quality control notes on the index cards he kept in his shirt pocket! If you ever made that list (and as a teenager, I frequently did), you better fix the problem, or he was going to follow-up until you did."

Of Christmas, Walt said, "One story stands out in my mind that might give you good insight into Roy and the importance he placed on the people in his organization! As a child, we always delayed opening our Christmas presents until late Christmas Day! Dad let as many of his employees as possible take Christmas off to be with their families, but that meant that he needed to be there, since they were operating with a skeleton crew! So, he worked Christmas Day every year for 43 years! I understood – his credo was: if you have responsibilities, meet them; if you make commitments, keep them! Take care of your people and they will take care of you.

Gordon Fee observed that when Roy worked these Christmas Day's it was not uncommon for him to put on gloves and pitch in to help the crew as needed, and there never was a grievance from his people for him "doing craft work."

Walt noted that, "Throughout my business career, I have benefited from the mentoring provided by many people that took the time to help me learn how to do my job better! However, I credit my father for the success that I have enjoyed, first as a sales manager and then as a management consultant! Thanks to the wise counsel I received from him (we talked about work every week for 35 years, with a particular emphasis on people issues), I made it to the top of the management consulting profession."

Walt became a Partner in the firm of Towers Perrin in New York responsible for global sales and marketing. I am sure Roy was proud of his accomplishments.

Walt concluded by saying, "My successes were modest compared to his, but he never let a conversation end without telling me how proud he was of me and my accomplishments! Given what he had to work with, I may be his biggest success story." Don't you see a bit of his Dad in that comment! Roy was always quiet and unassuming, but highly focused on the key aspects of managing people, such as praising them for work well done.

As Walt closed out the e-mail, he commented on Roy's family and their love for him noting they would miss him greatly! He then expressed his gratitude that the people at Y-12 would know and remember Roy Williams as being among the "courageous and dedicated people that accomplished the impossible against all odds! Importantly, Y-12's history is a story that needs to be told so future generations will understand what it takes to succeed."

Now don't you know I beamed with pride when I read that comment! Roy Williams, a leader and one among many who dedicated their lives so the rest of us can enjoy freedom. Our nation owes a debt to their honor!