

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

**Saturday With Sinatra**

by Dr. Edward Hoffman

Much of what I know about success and leadership comes from my early experiences working at Abada International, a small import/export company based in New York City, and its colorful owner Joe Abada. Joe did not perfect his leadership style using books or by parroting the latest highfalutin' theory; rather, he built the company from nothing to a success through common sense and hard work.

This was several years before my career at NASA, meaning I was a very young man at the time. Befitting my level of experience, the job position had no title. It was assumed that my work revolved around the requirements of the day and the needs of the business. Generally, assignments centered on maintenance of the building, preparing inventory for shipment and repairing damaged goods.

The work was straightforward and hard, requiring attention to detail and adaptability. For example, once a month I was expected to clean the roof. A New York City roof was not high on my list of preferred work activities. Aside from the general soot and dirt, invariably there was unrecognizable organic or inorganic matter that I would inspect from the end of a broom and often try to avoid. From my roof responsibilities, I learned the importance of intuitive leadership.

Joe would never dictate how to do an assignment, but he would clearly define the task and trust you to get it done. At the appropriate time he would nonchalantly walk around and start talking, promptly providing me with clear feedback on the work. He would always check the corners. I tended to do a poor job with the corners because, in my experience, the strangest looking creatures always decayed in the corners.

There was never any lack of clarity with Joe. Either it was good work or I would be given specific examples of my sub-performance. If the work were not up to standard (and standards were high), the work was done again until it was right. I learned the importance of cleaning the corners. Forget about trying to hide the dirt.

One of the things that endeared me to Joe and why I still appreciate his genius was what I learned from him on the Saturday shift. During the evening hours we listened to a radio show called "Saturday with Sinatra." Joe loved listening to Sinatra, and had no qualms about working to the sound of Ol' Blue Eyes. Until it ended, we stayed and worked with the music blasting in the background.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Saturday With Sinatra (cont'd)

Strangely, despite the long hours, it was fun. There was a pride in having the stamina to put in those hours, and the fun was on account of the music. Hard work and high standards are important, but so is taking care of yourself, and if that means improving the environment so that you enjoy being there, then turn up your radios and play what makes you happy.

