

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION HAROLD J. LEAVITT

(1922-2007)

Harold J. Leavitt, the Walter Kenneth Kilpatrick Professor of Organizational Behavior emeritus at the Graduate School of Business, died on December 8, 2007, at the age of 85. Leavitt had pulmonary fibrosis.

Leavitt was a pioneer in the development of the academic field of organizational behavior. His 1958 book, *Managerial Psychology*, was one of the early texts in this field. Currently in its fifth edition, the book has been translated into 18 languages. A companion volume, *Readings in Managerial Psychology*, was also widely used in courses.

Hal Leavitt was intellectually curious and active up to the end of his life. He wrote extensively about hierarchies and why they persist, group process, leadership, attitudes, communication network structure, organizational size and design. He was one of the first to write about the importance of organizational environments for understanding organizational behavior. Leavitt was a frequent commentator on and critic of MBA education, arguing that problem discovery was as important a task as analyzing existing problems.

Leavitt supervised and influenced many doctoral students throughout his academic career, first at the University of Chicago, then at Carnegie-Mellon University, and later at Stanford. His influence on business management and education was profound. He consulted and spoke all over the world, directed the Stanford Executive Program for many years, and was the founding director of the Stanford Business School-National University of Singapore executive program in Singapore that recently celebrated its 25th year.

Leavitt's engaging personality and fresh thinking stimulated the development of new MBA courses and was instrumental in building the organizational behavior (OB) group at Stanford. When Hal arrived at Stanford in 1966, there were five full-time faculty members and light enrollments in OB electives. On 2008, OB is the largest faculty group in the business school and has a sterling academic teaching reputation.

Leavitt was a prolific writer with a lively, accessible, provocative style. His publications varied from textbooks to articles in academic journals and the popular business press.

Born in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1922, Leavitt was the youngest of eleven children. Leavitt's first wife, Gloria Rosenthal Leavitt, died in 1985. He is survived by his widow, Jean Lipman-Blumen, of Pasadena, and three children, John Leavitt, an anthropology professor in Montreal, David Leavitt, a well-known author and English professor at the University of Florida, and Emily Leavitt, a social worker in San Francisco.

Harold Leavitt received a bachelor's degree from Harvard College, a master's from Brown University, and a Ph.D. from M.I.T. Leavitt was the first doctoral student in a group led by Douglas McGregor of Theory Y fame. He was a big part of a newly emerging humanistic approach to management. Leavitt began his academic career at the frontier of management thought and he remained a pioneer throughout his life.

Leavitt produced numerous books and articles: *Managerial Psychology* (1958), *Corporate Pathfinders* (1986), *Hot Groups* (with Jean Lipman-Blumen, 1999), and *Top Down: Why Hierarchies are Here to Stay and How to Manage Them More Effectively* (2006). Each publication focused on people's relationship to work, with interpersonal relationships, with the group, and with the whole organization. Leavitt was consistently attempting to help us understand how to create work environments that provide greater individual freedom, enable the individual to experience greater ennoblement through work, and produce better organizational results.

Leavitt's *Top Down* book was a response to observers who had long been predicting the demise of hierarchies and the growth of more egalitarian forms of management. Leavitt concluded that big, top-down hierarchies were inevitable in human activity. Employees should learn to modify and team these hierarchies and how to work effectively inside them.

Perhaps Hal's most amusing personal trait was his sweet tooth. His bottomless appetite for cake, pies, cookies, jelly, and junk food was widely known. He nearly always ate at least two desserts.

His colleagues both in OB and in other fields and by his doctoral, master's, and executive education students knew Leavitt as a warm and kind man. Many students remember fondly pleasant evenings spent at the Leavitt house on Cooksie Lane. His focus was on others and on ideas, not on his personal ambition or achievements.

Many admirers, some coming from distant continents, gathered to honor Hal Leavitt at Stanford memorial service on February 14, 2008. The tributes were numerous and uniformly full of affection and praise. Among the qualities described orally and in writing were words such as warm, cheerful, supportive, adorable, generous, moral support, coaching, infectious enthusiasm, genuine, comforting, soothing, gentle, and consistency. These qualities were one reason that, even after being retired from Stanford for almost two decades, Leavitt received such an outpouring of tribute from the Stanford community.

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