



TECH STAR



Andres Fortino: Teaching Excellence in Technology

[By Akbar Ali]

As associate provost and dean of Polytechnic University's Westchester campus, Dr. Andres Fortino is doing what he does best: educating others on the complex specialty that is information technology and technology management. His tenure as dean is preceded by an impressive working history both within the industry and academia, including work in IBM Corporation's advanced technology division and a stint as dean of Marist College's School of Management. Fortino's dedication to his dual passions of technology and education is demonstrated through a number of other distinctions, including his status as a Fulbright Scholar and as a visiting professor at Cambridge University. If there is one assessment that can be made of Fortino's career, it is that innovation in technology comes only through constant education, something he fully understands as dean.

Fortino's interest in technology began not with a desire to be a part of the modern era's digital revolution, but with his desire to fully utilize the main purpose of technology: to make communication and daily functions simpler and more accessible for users.

"I am fundamentally an engineer. I love to create new things, build things, and solve problems — but with a purpose, something that is of use or which serves a useful purpose. [This is] different from a scientist that asks why the universe works the way it does — I ask how I can make it work.

"And [I seek] to create in a different way from an artist in that the end result of my creativity has to be of immediate use. Even my art is representational, and I would like to bring an object of beauty for people to decorate their homes. My art does not make a statement: it's to be used to bring happiness."

He says that no single life experience propelled toward a career in technology. In fact, his most serious professional ambition was to become an engineer.

"I always remembered wanting to an engineer. The toys I played with, the things I used as a child all said: build, create, make, be of use. I remember that as a child in Argentina, while my family was waiting for a visa to immigrate to the U.S., we talked with my father who was already here via short

wave radio. I was fascinated by the radio equipment of the ham operator who helped

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I love to travel, especially cruising (my next cruise is in January, following in the footsteps of Charles Darwin in a latter-day Voyage of the Beagle from Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile, on a cruise ship). I love photography and creating artwork for friends and family.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Buena Vista Social Club, Santana, Glen Miller, Cole Porter, Miles Davis.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Economist* [and] *New York Times Magazine*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *NCIS* [and] *Dr. Who*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Maitreya Buddha.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. Comedians like Bill Cosby [and] *New Yorker* cartoons.

us connect. I remember going home after a radio session and making a make-believe radio out of a shoe box with make-believe cardboard radio dials, just so I could play at making ham radio calls! I was eight years old."

Fortino's formal education in both Argentina and the United States helped direct him toward a more technological bent in his academic pursuits, ultimately allowing him to complete his bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees in electrical engineering.

"I always remembered going to technical schools. I attended a technical grade school in Argentina. In New York I attended Stuyvesant High School, a science and technology school.

"I received my undergraduate and graduate education all the way to the Ph.D. at the City College of New York Engineering School. It was a wonderful and thorough engineering education, and for an immigrant child, the best part was [that] it was totally free! It was the best education in the world. And I am very grateful and feel very fortunate."

While fulfilling his academic responsibilities, Fortino did make a concerted effort to engage in more than the engineering curriculum at a pivotal time in the nation's history.

"I belonged to ROTC on campus. It was



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during the Vietnam Era, and I thought it my duty to pay my country back by training to be an officer and [serving], so I attended ROTC and was proud to be commissioned a second lieutenant in the army as a signal staff officer. I never saw combat and left the army shortly after entering active duty when the war ended and the army reduced its staff. It was disappointing but made me go back to graduate school. And [that's] a good thing, too."

Upon graduation, Fortino took his first steps into the industry, cognizant of the fact that what he hoped for most was to be both technical and creative in order to produce the most notable breakthroughs of the growing technology business.

"My first real job as a professional was with IBM as a researcher and a chip maker. That was a wonderful, magical time. I worked with many creative people making these very tiny things that powered a whole industry.

"I was there at the birth of the first PC, saw the world of data networking grow up, and debated the protocols needed to power the Internet. My job was [working] as an ion implanter. We accelerated atoms of boron, phosphorus, and arsenic with electric fields, separated them with magnetic fields, and slammed them into silicon wafers.

"I did some research, wrote some papers, and filed many patents. And I worked with some very creative people: Dave Pricer and Larry Heller, who had hundreds of patents. I learned my creative trade under them. That was fun."

Despite this early success, Fortino was left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. Technology turned out to be an inadequate canvas for his deepest expressions, forcing him to look elsewhere in applying his expertise.

"What I always wanted to do was teach. So I eventually got a position at Cooper Union and later Temple University teaching engineering. Then, when I became a data communications consultant and later a networking expert, I was constantly teaching seminars on technology with Learning Tree International. I worked for them for 17 years. I worked as Director of IT and later as CIO of a small non-profit.

"Ten years ago I became a faculty member again, this time in technology and innovation management. Later I became a graduate program director, and now I am a college administrator. I was dean of a business school at Marist College, and recently Associate Provost at Polytechnic University."

While at Polytechnic, Fortino has done more than serve as dean: he has spent the last semester developing a radio show with local CIOs, including Alcatel, FUJIFILM, IBM, and the USTA. This program is designed to make students and parents aware of the possibilities and opportunities waiting for those who pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

In light of his enduring and varied history in a multitude of industries and professional posts, Fortino has had a long string of career accomplishments, though it is a personal one which keeps the rest in perspective.

"I have a great granddaughter (November 15, 6lb 11 oz). Now, that's an accomplishment!

"But in terms of my career, I guess it would be the seven books I have written, some on chip making, some on data commutations. I also hold two patents and ten invention disclosures [from] working at IBM.

"But most of all, I loved being director of the technology management graduate program at George Mason University. I loved the

students — I loved teaching in the program and taking them all over the world and [watching] them grow as managers.

"I am most proud of being of service everywhere I worked, especially in academic institutions where I helped hundreds of young men and women expand their horizons through education. I helped to open the door of opportunity for many that education affords. They do the sacrificing, the heavy lifting, and the incredible, heroic effort of studying part-time while working. I am privileged to be the facilitator of the transforming experiences they undertake."

Having made such an impact in the lives of others as an educator, Fortino has likewise been influenced by the mentorship of several others over the years, notably those who helped him complete his long and difficult studies, and professional colleagues who served as role models.

"Professionally, your thesis mentor always plays a big part, so I would have to say Dr. Joseph Nadan. Then there were memorable teachers like Dr. Weiner who taught me control theory. I wanted to emulate his teaching style because he made it look so easy and fun.

"At IBM there were Dave Pricer and Larry Heller, but I admired them from afar. They were the patent gods of IBM, and I wanted to walk in their footsteps.

"On a personal note, I had an incredibly influential personal spiritual teacher, Elizabeth Clare Prophet. She helped me clarify the purpose for my life and what I was doing walking the planet: to be of service. That was a seminal lesson. She was my teacher of 25 years."

As dean, Fortino is accustomed to guiding students, and he extends much of the same



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advice to young professionals just starting out. He counsels others to seek not only professional excellence, but personal excellence, as both are rarely achieved in isolation.

“Be flexible,” he says. “Learn from everyone and every situation. Ask: ‘What is the lesson here?’ And it is not always technical.

“I recently had the opportunity to work with someone of a different race. More than anyone, she made me realize that I was still

very much prejudiced. And when I came face to face with it by working with this person on a daily basis, I saw the subtle elements of my racism and was able to overcome it and be free from it.

“You must always be attuned to what lesson is being delivered to your door and what that lesson is, and take advantage of it! And it is not always a technical lesson.

“When I interviewed many CIO colleagues

on my radio show over the past year, I found there was one rule to the path to be a CIO: there is no single path. They all (and I mean *all*) came from different directions, with different backgrounds and education and interests. But they all followed two rules: (1) they were passionate about whatever they were doing at the moment and (2) wanted to excel at it. None of them set out to be CIOs, but all eventually found themselves with the job.”

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