PRIDE AND EGO

By: Sdr. Chow Chee Meng

A few years back, there was a young engineer who upon graduation was lucky enough to find a job which he immensely enjoyed and was able to apply the knowledge he acquired in university. He went about his job with great dedication and was always eager to learn. This thirst for knowledge and sense of humility was what made him a better engineer day by day. To him, everyone was a mentor; his bosses, his peers, contractors, technicians, general workers, everyone. He would regard himself as an average person and would always try to improve himself. His employer appreciated his good qualities and he was rewarded with a promotion.

Alas, upon promotion, he began to change. Unknown to himself, a deadly disease had already infected him. A deadly disease by the name of "pride and ego." With all the praises heaped upon him, he forgot about the qualities which brought him there in the first place. He began to regard himself as "smart" and others as inferior compared to him. He would be very critical of the work of others and was blind towards his own work. His typical statement would begin with "Oh, that guy. Lousy-lah." Day by day, his ego and pride grew ever bigger but not his knowledge. His pride and ego were so huge that he would not ask his peers (juniors were a definite no) for advice. He would not allow his own work to be commented upon and would always think that he was correct. He would not discuss his work with others as he regarded others as not worthy or knowledgeable enough to comment on his work. Questions about his work were swiftly pushed aside as silly questions and he could not be bothered to explain to his peers and juniors. When others were working extra hours, he would say to himself, "Those fellows are working hard, not smart. The company doesn't need cows." Sort of reminds us of the story between the rabbit and the tortoise, doesn't it? Thus, with time, those which he regarded as tortoises slowly overtook him while he slid backwards. At the end of the day, it was the tortoise that crossed the finishing line ahead of him. Only then he realised that life is a marathon and not a 100m dash.

Well, is it a fictional story? I believe everyone is susceptible to the disease. It is just that some of us control it better than others. I also believe that this disease is most pronounced in smart people like engineers. That is natural because smart people are seldom wrong and they have been successful all their life. Straight As, a first job that pays well, and so on. It is therefore natural that they are less receptive towards criticism. It is of course worse if we are not smart and walk around with a huge ego!!!

So what are the symptoms of being infected with "pride and ego"? I think the following are the early signs of the disease based on my own painful experience:

a) Absence of the word "sorry" from a person's vocabulary. He does not need to apologise as he thinks that he is always correct.
b) Lack of courtesy. He regards everyone as inferior so there is no need for courtesy.
c) Refuses to work in a team.
d) Favourite sentences: "I don't like that guy", "Like that also don't know?", "That stupid guy" and other similar meaning sentences.

I certainly have been infected with the above disease and at one stage reached a critical stage. And the worse part is that I am the tortoise who thinks that he is the rabbit. But I have since been brought down back to earth and it really hurt. In this article, I just wish to share my humble experience with fellow young engineers. We certainly have a long way to go and a lot to learn. So, if anyone of us starts to think that the world is full of nuts, remember the following words from Karl Terzaghi, widely regarded as the father of modern soil mechanics:

"Very few people are either so dumb or so dishonest that you could not learn anything from them". ■