

the SME, his collaboration with the University of San Jorge.

During my time in that same Vice-Presidency, I reached out to Víctor as he was leading the Delegation in the Aragon's Autonomous Community. It turned out to be the best decision I could make as it wasn't necessary to appoint anyone else. His knowledge of the institution, composed speech and elegant manners, which I knew all too well, made any change unnecessary. Having collaborators of that stature guaranteed good management of affairs in that region and frankly, he was the best man for the job.

Unfortunately, some months later cancer reared its head again and he was forced to turn in his resignation. I interpreted this as a sign of his honest character. He felt this situation would be a hindrance and make him incapable of meeting his responsibilities within CSIC. Víctor's mindset was always to serve and not to be served; he wanted me to be free to do without him.

I immediately replied that although this was a magnanimous gesture, I would only consider when he felt that he could no longer continue. I firmly believe that people with such a distinguished service record are fundamental in any workplace and best kept close for as long as you can. I managed to keep him for an additional two months until he reached retirement. It marked the end of a good career for a great man.

I continued to stay in touch and follow up on his disease. We talked when he was in the bubble isolated in hospital. I always admired his composure in the midst of adversity even when he knew it was a lost battle. Our conversations touched on the subjects that were most dear to him: Nature, his beloved Pyrenees, the place he would escape to every year to be with friends; Family, the center of his universe, which at the time had just welcomed a new grandchild; and lastly, the reflection

about his social and vital compromise which had led him to walk the Camino de Santiago.

After his retirement, I would see him on my visits to Zaragoza or we would speak on the phone. I recall that in one of our last conversations he said, in his usual delicate and affectionate manner, "Hello, Vice-President." When I would jokingly remind him I was Ex-Vice President, he quickly countered that I would always be "his Vice-President." I never had the chance to tell him what his words meant to me.

I am not one to follow gruesome TV shows, because I do not like them, nor do I enjoy political intrigues of which I know them perfectly well as they've been the subject of my research for 40 years. I prefer those that highlight human values, solidarity and public service. There is one I have seen recently (Chicago Fire, season 9, episode 15; minute 12:15–12:34), where one of the actresses points out the value of the word "good" when describing people. This word, due to the generalization, seems trivial but in her family, it was the highest degree as it meant that a person had honor, was loyal and brave.

I think long speeches or excessive praises are not necessary to describe a man like Víctor, it is enough to say he was a *good man*.

José Ramón Urquijo Goitia

CSIC's ex Vice President (9.02.2012–12.12.2017)

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Víctor M. Orera

Víctor, un buen hombre



Many people understand freedom as the ability to choose. While it is true that self-determination is at the root of liberty, the full power of freedom lies in our ability to create strong and stable bonds with people, ideas and institutions that go far beyond us. Friendship is one of the most important of these links. It begins with a common interest (do not tell me!, you are also crazy about ...) and develops progressively over time as friends share more personal aspects of their lives, visions, fears, illusions and frustrations, while they look for understanding, advice and support. As the intimacy grows, two main features of the bond of friendship are strengthened, namely unselfishness and benevolence. Within this framework, you are able to see and appreciate the beauty in your friend, which acts as a force that pushes you towards better and higher goals.

In fact, we have to be very grateful to our good friends because they make us better persons.

I met Víctor in the last decade of the past century. He was interested in measuring and understanding the mechanical properties of various types of eutectic ceramic materials manufactured in his laboratory. I was interested in how to make strong ceramics tough, particularly for high temperature applications. This common interest in the mechanical performance of ceramics led to a fruitful, interdisciplinary research collaboration lasting more than fifteen years. We met with each other often, exchanged viewpoints, co-authored a good number of papers (a couple of them stood as "highly-cited" publications), attended conferences, wrote proposals, and dis-

covered once again how difficult it is to make ceramics strong and tough. The common research interests eventually faded away as we moved onto different topics and other activities and the opportunities to meet become more limited, but the close friendship and the feeling of nearness remained. From this position, I had the privilege to enrich myself by contemplating the human and spiritual caliber of Víctor. He had deep and robust foundations in his family – Pilar, Alodia and Irene – and his Christian faith, and people around him were attracted by his natural leadership, which was rooted in always putting people and principles first. This type of management was independent of whether he was taking care of his last student or of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, as vice-president for Organization and Institutional Relationships. He always said what he thought, but he did it in a way that was difficult to feel hurt because you could see that his aim was to help people out. Moreover, Víctor had a wide range of interests and passions, and we often shared our viewpoints on hiking, science, management of scientific institutions, service to society, leadership, religion, and many other topics that come up between good friends. He was always proud of the accomplishments of those near to him, whether his wife and daughters or the researchers who had supported to grow and mature.

During the last years of his life, we talked mainly to each other over the phone or by email. On December 20th, 2019 I sent him a WhatsApp message of greetings for his birthday and received an answer that was obviously a good bye. So, I called him up the next morning, and we had our last long chat. We were both conscious of this fact, and I tried to keep calm. He realized that he was hiking the last steps of this life, was happy with what he had accomplished during his tenure here and was looking forward to the next step. In this last chat, as it had always been the case, Víctor was an inspiring example, a friend that helps you find the right answer to the many difficult questions and situations that you find in your life. I have benefitted from many good people and circumstances during my scientific career, and my friendship with Víctor has been a leading one. May he rest in peace but his example as a person and scientist remain as an inspiration to all of us.



Víctor and I during a cultural visit in Kyoto in 2006. We were attending the 2nd International Workshop on directionally solidified eutectic ceramic oxides.

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