

Introduction (Ginger): I'm Ralph's wife, we've been together for quite some time and have six grandchildren. I have a finance background, corporate finance. And my most treasured experience is being a mom.

Introduction (Ralph): So again, my wife, Ginger and I, again, we have six boys.

Question 1: Tell us a little about your journey from your Emory graduation to now.

Response (Ralph): In addition to that, I've been through academia with an undergrad in chem engineering and my MBA course from Emory, and a degree from Cambridge. On the business side, I've run companies from all over the world. I've also been an expat in different countries. And we also try to do some philanthropic work every year. We really believe in giving back. It is very, very important to us. And it was interesting when this project first came out on creativity because certainly, everyone's lives, I think, take different journeys and different paths like that. And it's fun to hear those experiences. And today, we're happy to share some of ours. So thanks for allowing it.

Question 2: What does creativity and living a creative life mean to you?

Response (Ralph): I think creativity, for me, is so important in that it helps you meet challenges. I think it brings a lot of life energy to whatever you do. There's a theory that I have on energy signatures, they did some work at Cambridge on it. But creativity, you have this journey that you're on, you don't know where it's going to go. And a lot of times the standards don't fit. And so what do you do when the standards don't fit? When I was with a Coca Cola company for a while, it's actually one of the things that Coca Cola executives really landed me a job with them because I was discussing with them, one day, some of the business initiatives we were talking about. And I was probably 15 years junior to the executives that I was in the meeting with and they said, *What do you think you could really bring to the party? Because we'd been 20, 30 year veterans with the company and we know this business inside out and so we appreciate you being with us today, but what do you think you can do?* And I said, *Absolutely no one has a lock on creativity.* And everybody froze and immediately stopped, said, *That's not too bad of an answer.* And about a year and a half later, they hired me. But I think that creativity is a lot of fun. It opens your mind to what could be rather than, again, what obviously is. And I tried to do it and actually have ways that I not forced my own creativity, but fueled my own creativity with things like either painting. Starting with an absolutely blank canvas and you don't know what you're going to paint. And allow your creativity to flow and have that energy and have that become a flow. And I've done it with business before where you hit certain junctures in business or science where it's like, *I have absolutely no idea what to do.* So you have to kind of step back and say, *Alright, what can I think of? What kind of creativity can I try to approach this with?* Understanding that I must have a solution, I must have some way to start to move forward. And all the traditional methods don't work. And so creativity... I did some significant work at Stanford on that. I've done some work over the years, just with education and other universities, honors as well as on my own. And as with education, I think it's just an amazing tool.

Response (Ginger): Oh, well, for me, having a finance degree and a long career in finance, I was used to thinking a little more linearly and didn't take those chances that, you know, creativity allows. Just hanging out with this guy, he's taught me to be more adventurous and creative, and he's actually taught me how to paint a little bit. And even just thinking a little more creatively about, you know, basic aspects of life. And I feel like it's a constant learning experience for someone who's not not naturally creative. But it's fun, and I'm really enjoying it.

Response (Ralph): When I was at Emory, the thesis I wrote on Total Product Management (TPM) was one that we had no idea how we were going to solve a problem when we started. And I think the creativity parts for me and some of the key things that I really learned through my MBA at Emory. First was when Dr. Jeff Rosensweig and I sat down and he agreed to be my advisor, we talked about taking on a real world problem. And at that time, the solution that TPM provided was to a multi-million dollar problem that was out in industry. But at the time, when we took it on, we had no idea and I had no idea that we were going to be able to find a solution to it. So to me, that was a really good challenge. It turned out to be something that the thesis itself was applied into an operating system that got copyrighted that eventually got deployed by the Coca Cola company to more than 33 countries in nine different languages. And it took a life of its own literally for the next 10 years. And I know Jeff said to me that it was so rewarding to see something like that actually be applied.

The other thing during that time of my courses at Emory and the MBA was with Dr. Roderick Gilkey. The course that he taught in leadership talked about balance and talked about not only, you know, what you would do as a leader in industry, but it talked about philanthropy, it talked about your personal development, it talked about family development and balancing things out. And I think that leadership course was very, very important for me and rounding out and continuing to develop probably some of the abstract thinking. I'm not a linear thinker, even though my undergraduate is chemical engineering. My abstract thinking in undergrad also got me in a lot of trouble from time to time. As everybody's very literally step-by-step doing things and I'm sitting back going, *But if you did this differently, wouldn't this be better?* And I can remember one case where I was asked to sit down after one of my abstract thoughts on how to make the world a better place and told that, *You know, someday when it's your company, or it's your project, Mr. Bietz, we will be glad to embrace that idea. But for now, we're doing it this very linear way. And this is the standard accepted way.* And it was, *Okay, yes sir, Professor, and thank you. Thank you very much.*

But I think it's really important to understand for everybody that creativity is not always accepted. And to your point made earlier in the interview about the challenges I had with executive education. And I'll talk more about that in a second. You will meet a lot of resistance with creativity. There's a cartoon one time that I think I actually used in a global lecture. And it shows a group of people in the beginning with somebody at the podium and they say, *How many people would like to change?* And everybody raises their hand. And then it shows another picture below that says, *How many people are willing to lead this change?* And there's like maybe one hand that goes up. And then below it, it says, *How many people are actually willing to change?* And nobody raises a hand, of course, and everybody's evacuating the auditorium because we always think in terms of somebody else to change or we've got a better idea, but they should do it. And the reality of it is we have to do it, we have to lead that creativity. And we are the change agent. It's not thinking that somebody else needs to change because of some parameter that we have. So I think it's so important for folks to understand that creativity also can sound wonderful.

And it is and it can bring about wonderful things, and it does. But you're going to need a tremendous amount of resistance in certain cases, if not pretty much everybody will be going against you if you're changing the standard of the world at that time or a standard of education at that time. And back when Dr. Joseph McCann and I co-wrote that Emory colloquium, it's the first custom education program in business and, from what we see, it was the first one in North America. But before that, I had 13 universities that I went to because I believed that I had a specific need with a corporation that I was starting a division in grassroots and the need for education and formal case studies like that. And I went to 13 different universities and it was absolutely heresy. You would think that I was, you know, dethroning the king or I was, you know, reading for impeachment of the President or something. The way they reacted was, *How dare you challenge us in bricks and mortar education at that time and talk about, you know, a custom program and potentially moving it offsite and professors going to your venue to teach it all*. And this was heresy. So as wonderful as creativity is and as important as I believe it is, the reality of it and its implementations are you're in for some turbulence.

Question 3: What drives you? What informs the way you navigate uncertainty and resistance or when you get pushback against your ideas?

Response (Ralph): I think what drives me is a combination of factors. One factor is I had some pretty humble beginnings. And I did have some people along the way, when I had out of 100 people, you know, was telling me, *Okay, well, you never get out of here, nobody ever gets out of this, you know, impoverished area like that*. And I'd seen generations of my family living there, I was determined to. But out of 100 people that told me I would never find my way out, there was one or two people that would say, *We will help you*. And I was working two, three jobs and trying to earn money and get to college and pay for my undergrad, which I did. But there are those people that step forward and help you. Sometimes it's out of areas that you absolutely don't expect. You don't see it coming. And you have to trust that. Trusting that that will happen along the way and that there will be those that will step up and help you. That meant a lot. And so to me, there's a part of it, if you will, that's paying it back or paying it forward, however you want to say that.

There's another part of it with the dimension of it, that I just feel compelled to do it. I see something and I think this would be so much better and I have energy around it, that if we created this or recreated doing this in a very different manner like that. And it becomes important to me and it becomes important that I think it will make a difference. And it's also something that I would say at some point, I have pride in it, that it's my work, because it's changed things. And it's changed things in such a way that helps a lot of people or is meaningful to a lot of people. And it can be business science or philanthropic. It doesn't really matter. But I just see something that I think can be adjusted or created. And I'll give you a couple examples of that. One week, we talked about the Custom Education Program and I going to myself that, *This is just tragic*. The knowledge never leaves university or the campus. Why can't we do that? Why can't we create something like that? And so as many people as thought I was committing heresy, I really believed there was somebody that would step up and say, *You know what, that's a good idea*. And thank goodness for John Robson, who was Dean at my time at Emory, and Dr. John McCann and Dr. Gilkey and other people that stepped in and helped with that.

Kind of a reverse of that was I was on mission to Honduras. And I had changed around one company I was working for their whole servant leader program, and wound up getting inadvertently elected Chair of the Board one day because I was late to a meeting and they had elections for officers. They said, *Well, we think Ralph should chair this, too.* By the time I walked in, I found out it was to the Board of a philanthropic mission. And I'd been part of one for years and years, but I'd never run one. And one of the things I realized was that and saw early on was that it was a good organization. But it was people writing checks to the organization and the organization just wrote a check to another organization. And that's nice. And it's nice that people donated the money in the best of heart. But I got the idea that I really wanted to connect people. So what I started doing was where people who would write checks in for the hometown area that they had, if they were a community leader like that, we would connect them to actually going and donating the check that the company wrote to the organization and seeing people in the food lines and interacting with people that were the directors of the food bank or the local orphanage or charity like that, as opposed to just people writing checks to each other. So it takes on a whole elevation of this new level of meaning. But when I first introduced that concept to the board of directors and also to the fellow who happened to be the owner of this one company, they thought it was insane. And they said it sounds good. But nobody's ever gonna really do that. And the moral of that story was two years later, the owner of this company actually flew people from Asia to spend, you know, half a day with me to explain the strategy changes so they could take it back to Asia and implement it in their own organizations.

Question 4: What do you know now that you think the 'you' back then would have found helpful to hear/know?

Response (Ralph): It's very important to have some sort of vision for yourself. And it doesn't have to be the definitive end-all-be-all vision, but to have a vision, to have some clear picture about, here's what I think is really important to me and what I want to try to do, even if you modify it. I think the other part of that to understand is that many people will say, *Either I'm not clear on that or I don't have one. Or, If I've got a clear one, then I absolutely rigidly have to stay to that.* And neither is true. What's important is that if you feel that here's the path you want to take, you can make adjustments along the way. It's your path and all of us have unique paths like that. And so I think that's the first thing I would say, though, is get some sense of where you want to go, what you want to do. But it doesn't mean that, again, you can't change, modify, or reverse along the way.

The second thing, I think, is to realize that you're going to meet some resistance when you're changing the world or when you're changing out of a set of circumstances. My circumstances where my family had been there for generations, and nobody ever got out. And so the normal was you don't get out and all the people around me saying that they were right, most of them never did make it out. But I think you ask yourself, how much does it mean to you to do it? And at that point, the vision I had for myself was that I won't be here. I'm going to be somewhere else. This doesn't work for me. I don't think it works for my children. I can remember exactly the beginning of my junior year in high school, standing at a certain venue and looking out over the fields on the farm that I grew up on and saying, *I'm not going to be here.* And I know I'm not going to be here really deep in. And I think there's a conviction that you have where it doesn't matter whether you're right or wrong, it doesn't matter how hard it is. What matters is that you have the conviction of moving forward.

Response (Ginger): Well, one thing that's important is to just remember to follow your dreams and follow whatever strange path that may come about that you didn't expect it, but it's all part of achieving your dreams. And allow your dreams to change as you change.