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## Scaling the Heights



Another year has come and gone and the reflective mood that sets in toward the end of each year is slowly fading as I sit down to write this column in February. The end of a year is also a time when you cannot pick up a magazine or a paper without seeing the highlights (or lowlights!) being proclaimed as "The Best of...", "The Worst of...", "The Most Memorable...", "Ten Best Moments in ...," etc., etc. Not to be outdone or left out, perhaps we should also review, in this magazine, the

events, personalities, and other aspects of each year that has passed by—how about "The Best ECS Plenary Lecture...", "The Best Feature Article in *Interface*..." or even "Most Memorable Moment at an ECS Meeting..."? We can even extend this idea to the best oral presentation given at the ECS meeting, the best article in the *Journal*, the best communication in *Letters*, and the best paper in *ECS Transactions*. Who would come up with these rankings? Do we conduct a poll? Surely, we don't want to put that burden on the editors who have enough on their plate. Nor, I suspect, would they would want to further test the limits of a delicate and tenuous relationship with those contributors who have received less than favorable feedback from the reviewers! By the same token, and unlike in the popular media, it would be imprudent to poll for the opposite end of the spectrum (i.e., the "Worst") without offending a few of our colleagues and the Society membership as well! Oh well, shelving this whole idea looks good; we'll just let the popular media do their end-of-the-year thing.

There were also many milestones during this past year, and one of the more poignant was the passing of one of the greatest mountain climbers of all time, Sir Edmund Hillary. Hillary, you recall, scaled Mt. Everest in the Himalayas on May 29, 1953. An interesting side-story relates to the role played by his Nepalese Sherpa fellow-climber, Tenzing Norgay. Did Hillary or Norgay reach the summit first? True to form, Hillary did graciously allow the story that Norgay scaled the summit first (for it gave greater pride to the Nepalese locals) although later, he acknowledged that it really didn't matter who was technically first as it was a *team game*. For the record, Norgay revealed shortly before his death in 1986, that Hillary, in fact, had reached the summit a few steps before him. However, it is debatable whether *either* man could have achieved this feat alone. We see this trend repeated often in history: for every Watson, there was a Crick; for every Hewlett, there was a Packard. For Don Quixote, there was Sancho Panza. Even for the *Lone Ranger*, there was Tonto! I wrote about teamwork in my previous column in the fall 2007 issue and there is much to be said for bringing complementary skills to the table. It is interesting that this dynamic extends to the performing/creative arts and sporting fields as well. For example, would Elvis Presley have become the legend that he is without the business savvy and promotional skills of his legendary manager, "Colonel" Tom Parker? In the tennis world, the über-focused routine of Bjorn Borg was orchestrated to the minute by his omnipresent coach, Lennart Bergelin. In all these cases, there was one person in the spotlight and there was another (equally important) in the background, away from the cameras.

In the science/technology world, other than the two sets of examples listed above, it is not clear to what extent this sort of complementarity plays a role. Did the Newtons, Einsteins, and Paulings of this world scale the scientific heights all alone? Perhaps they are the exceptions rather than the rule. Stay tuned.

Raj K.

**Krishnan Rajeshwar**  
**Editor**

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