Robert W. Taylor's Internet Hall of Fame Acceptance Statement

Thank you for inducting me into the Internet Society's Internet Hall of Fame. I retired 17 years ago in 1996 and had, long ago, given up thinking about such things. But I am grateful none the less.

I do, however, have some trouble with the way in which we, as a society, implement the idea of awards. Like this one, awards are usually given to individuals. But in computer research, especially in computer systems research, significant achievements are accomplished by teams of people, not just one or two.

For example, the Alto System at the Computer Science Lab of Xerox PARC (which enabled the first internet in1976) was designed and built from the contributions of more than two dozen researchers. Today, a list of them reads like a Who's - Who of Computer Science. Many of these have been honored over the years by several organizations, but like me, they are there as individuals. Yet, again like me, they owe and depend upon many colleagues for their accomplishments.

While at NASA in the early 1960s I awarded a research contract to Doug Engelbart's group at SRI: the work of that group made me look good --- not only my work, their work! In 1966 I initiated the ARPAnet project which came online in 1969. Many people contributed to that project, and their work, not only mine, made me look good. And again, throughout the '70s, '80s, and first half of the '90s outstanding work by the researchers at PARC and DEC SRC made me look good. I am here primarily because of them!

And I am not the only one who owe so many. Every one of the Internet Hall of Fame members are here, in part, because of the work of many other contributors. And a lot of these contributors are not being recognized. Shouldn't that make all of us feel a little guilty?

We say we are team players, but underneath we still worship the individual. We accept the inevitability of team creativity, but we remain fascinated with the one-man band.

Now I can understand why, in some practical sense, this is as it is, but it doesn't have to be. Why not establish a new awards tradition for recognizing extraordinary group accomplishments? In addition to PARC's Computer Science Lab and DEC's Systems Research Center, I offer a few more examples from the past: Disney's Animation Group; Lockheed's Skunk Works; and the Manhattan Project. Surely the accomplishments of these groups can compete favorably with anyone's individual achievement.

A Japanese proverb comes to mind: "None of us are as smart as all of us".

Thank You!