

# TRIBUTE PAGE

Geary Rummler made a lasting impact on the companies he worked with, the individual clients he supported, the International Society for Performance Improvement, and the many colleagues he influenced through his writings, presentations, leadership, and collegial sharing. Here are some of their thoughts.

IT BECAME OBVIOUS TO ME early on that Geary's model (with the added genius of Dale Brethower) was simply the best for designing organizational operations and resources to add measurable value. It was both rich and elegant at the same time. That is why we recruited him to be on the performance improvement international faculty at the Sonora Institute of Technology. His major influence on me was how his mind worked and his stubborn integrity about defining and delivering useful results.

Roger Kaufman, CPT, PhD, professor emeritus, Florida State University, Distinguished Research Professor, Sonora Institute of Technology (Mexico), and Roger Kaufman & Associates

From the day I took my first course from Geary Rummler at the University of Michigan in 1967, he was my hero and my mentor. He convinced me I wanted to become a performance analyst and provided me with the basic tools that I have used ever since. I know he did the same for many other people active in business process work today.

When I decided to write a book on business process change, I traveled to Tucson several times to discuss my ideas with him and to discover his latest insights. I was scheduled to have dinner with him this past month, but he died before we could meet again.

As with a parent, so with an intellectual mentor—you never really have time to finish the conversation. It just gets broken off, and the one who is left keeps thinking of new ideas that would amuse the person, rebuttals to past arguments you have had, or other questions you would like to ask. And you can't—you are simply left to live with the loss.

I have lost my mentor, and our field has lost its most profound process methodologist.

Paul Harmon, executive editor and founder, Business Process Trends

Geary Rummler's work was and is a beacon; it provides a standard against which all performance professionals can evaluate their own work. My first encounter with Geary's work was a 1967 paper by Karen Brethower, "Maintenance Systems: The Neglected Half of Behavior Change." It contains a deficiency analysis guide developed by Geary, an unmistakable precursor to the Mager and Pipe guide, *Analyzing Performance Problems* (1997), now in its third edition, right down to a question about performers being able to perform if their lives depended on it. Mager and Pipe cited Karen's article in the first edition of this book in 1970, perhaps acknowledging their debt to Geary.

I followed Geary's work over the years as its focus moved through the various levels of performance and as he moved from Praxis to Kepner-Tregoe to Rummler-Brache and, last, to the Performance Design Lab (PDL). Thanks to an invitation from Geary, I was looking forward to working with him and his colleagues at PDL when his sudden passing closed off that adventure. My loss is nothing compared to the loss his passing signals for his family and our field. We have lost one of our field's founders and its best engineer, and the world has lost one of its finest human beings. Were Geary to read this, I have the sense he would smile and in his gentlemanly way say something like, "Suck it up, Fred. Get on with it." Geary Rummler was not the kind of person to dwell on the downside.

Fred W. Nickols, CPT, managing partner, Distance Consulting, LLC

I met Geary at my first National Society for Performance and Instruction (NSPI) conference in 1980. Geary was very nice, and so very unassuming/humble for someone already so renown.

When I joined Motorola in early 1981, I got to work with Geary on many projects. Really, I figuratively carried his pencils and paper. After each key meeting or at the end of the day, he, Carol Panza, my boss, and I would all

debrief—and I believe that is where I really learned from him.

I continued using the Rummler analysis methods in subsequent work settings. I saw Geary at every NSPI/ISPI conference where I always sat in the front row for my annual booster shot. At most conferences, there would be the late-night sessions at the bar, where he would talk with others and share. Always sharing.

When I wrote my book *lean-ISD* in 1999, I asked Geary to review it, and if he felt uncomfortable about my claim that the analysis methods were based on his approaches, would edit all of that out. He did the book review and also generously redesigned the book's cover for me as a surprise.

I miss him and his company at dinner at our conferences and especially miss his dry humor. He often quoted Popeye in the 1980s when we worked and traveled together. Two favorites: "I yam what I yam" and "That's all that I can stands 'cause I can't stands no more."

Guy W. Wallace, CPT, president, EPPIC Inc.

Geary's theories, models, and big, bold personality have made an impact on my life that I feel daily. I hear "white space" referenced regularly in my job (and sometimes incorrectly, which gives me a silent chuckle). I think to myself, "What are the variables at play here?" when faced with an issue. In discussions with colleagues and clients, I mentally categorize information into Geary's models, and I build those models to gain clarity and communicate and influence outcomes. I quote Geary by saying, "If I can't draw it, I don't understand it," before I go to the whiteboard. We worked together at PDL for four and a half years. It was my dream job, and he was the dream boss and mentor. I am truly blessed to have had that opportunity.

Beyond work, I learned from Geary to appreciate bright colors and red buffalo paintings, that local baseball games in the heat of summer can be fun with the right people, and a lot about how to make life and work meaningful, interesting, and fun. Thank you, Geary. Much love, K.

Kimberly Morrill Priest, CPT, U.S. Navy

Our world is a dimmer place without the brilliant wisdom and quick wit of Geary. My work has been deeply enriched and refined by Geary's innovations. In 1965 I invited Geary, Karen Brethower, Joe Yaney, and Dale Brethower from the Center for Programmed Learning for Business in Michigan to San Francisco to assist me in developing a staff of fledgling performance improvement professionals in Pacific Telephone. My line management experience enabled me to see how their models and processes could affect bottom-line results. As Ma Bell transferred me into 10 different jobs in 11 years, I found

applications for these performance improvement strategies in every department. And I never overlooked the importance of the white space.

The proven organizational results chain was a stepping-stone for me to a wider application in the value chain to have an impact on societal problems of reproductive health, the spread of HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, and infant mortality. The world is a healthier place for hundreds of people as a result.

I continued to learn from Geary in more recent years as we cofacilitated the ISPI HPT Institutes, and over dinners following the long days of the Pro Series workshops. His legacy of those clear and valuable lessons lives in each of us, and it is now time for us to be mentors and pass it on.

Margo Murray, CPT, MBA, president  
and chief operating officer, MMHA  
The Managers' Mentors, Inc.

We all have our own unique perspectives that have to do with how and when our life's path intersected with Geary's.

I had the opportunity to meet and then work for Geary mostly as a consequence of two important projects I had completed. Both projects focused on the design and development of performance-based appraisal and management systems for large organizations—one a global oil company and the other an agency of the U.S. federal government. Geary asked me to join the newly formed TRG (The Rummler Group) as senior associate in 1981.

I was the only other consultant, working directly on client projects, for most of my tenure at TRG. This afforded me the opportunity to lead interesting projects and meet fascinating people from an array of client organizations. Working for and with Geary was an incredible experience. He was perennially positive and supportive, and he always treated me and my work with respect. What more could I ask? Well, before working for Geary, I was told that he had a fantastic (and very dry) sense of humor. Geary could always make me laugh! How great is that!

Geary was passionate and committed to his work. He always sought to make a difference, and he was hugely successful. But he never sat back and considered his work done. He was always thinking and seeking to achieve even more.

Carol M. Panza, CPT, CMP Associates

I have drawn my inspiration as a model maker, author, and teacher from a handful of colleagues. They are the ones whose books and articles I always read, whose presentations I always attended, whose conversations I paid very close attention to, the ones I gave credit to over and over, and whose friendships I valued the most.

I have now lost two of my five gurus, and their spark to my imagination is sorely missed. Their contributions to my ideas will always be felt because good ideas live beyond this life. Thank you, Geary, for being my friend and idea colleague.

Danny Langdon, Performance International

What does one say when asked, “How has this person influenced your work and career?” when the person has been first a model and later a professional and intellectual colleague whose thoughts and ideas over 30 years are inextricably interwoven into my own?

I began following Geary’s presentations in the 1970s and 1980s as he, like me, was seriously focused on organizational performance. But more important than presentations were the after-session digressions at a bar of a very small group of fellow practitioners struggling with organizational performance issues and manic about data. Geary was central to these yearly digressions, the mother lode of thought and exchange.

By the late 1990s, our discussion group evolved into a series of periodic meetings when seven of us would get together for a few days (usually at Geary’s place) and share where we have been, what we were doing, and where we were going next. The impact of these discussions on all of us is, I am sure, measurable, and Geary was the source of much of this learning and searching.

At the September 2008 fall conference in Albuquerque, Geary and I, in typical fashion, agreed on two action items. The second was to convene a new discussion group to push things further once again. But first was to finalize a new model for analyzing and designing organizations we had been talking about for two years. We were going to integrate the vector and PDL systemic approaches to organizational performance and incorporate critical new elements from chaos theory, particularly the complexity and emergence of concepts that could prove crucial to shorter analysis and implementation time frames in larger organizations. And that last long sentence exemplifies what I will miss most.

For some things, there is no substitute, and Geary was one—a true gentleman, a colleague, and a scholar.

J. Robert (Bob) Carleton, Vector Group

I met Geary Rummler a number of years ago when I attended my first ISPI conference in San Francisco. I was overwhelmed by his presence but more so by his humbleness. He was and always will be the giant of performance improvement, and he will always remain my mentor in this field. He inspired me to learn and know more, and what I appreciated most was his unselfish willingness to share his knowledge and himself.

Belia Nel, CPT, Leaders of Learners

Understanding the work and the management of work is central to the success or failure of an organization. There is a lot of noise in organizations, mostly made by people, so people tend to get an inordinate amount of management time. If organizations are to deliver value that customers care about, understanding the work is key. How work gets done is largely invisible to management, so the default is to press on resources—people, budgets, and others—to get results. Why? Management can see resources. But the reality is that the work engine, with resource allocation the fuel, drives value and results. Management’s job is to understand and have insight into these two interrelated variables—resources and work. This is a simple truth and has informed my thinking in almost every decision I make, in every problem I tackle. Being able to model the work so it can be seen and managed has had a profound impact on my personal effectiveness and on the performance of the organizations I support. Not a day goes by that I do not in some fashion use Geary’s anatomy of performance as the backdrop for decision making, troubleshooting, and diagnosis. This notion has forever changed how I think about organizations. My thoughts here echo Geary’s work and thinking, and my experience over the years reinforces their efficacy. 🏔️

Mark Munley, AAA Northern California