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My Friend, Todd Ricketts

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What can I say about Todd Ricketts, professionally, that is not best summarized by Google Scholar or in his biography on the Vanderbilt University website? He has had an excellent career with more great contributions to come. What I would rather discuss, and are not so visible, are his tremendous contributions behind the scenes and the positive impact he has had on the lives and careers of his friends. Of course, I cannot talk to everyone, so I discuss his impact on my career journey and what he means to someone like me.

Back in the late 1990s, which sounds old as I write this, I joined the University of Iowa PhD program with Ruth Bentler as my mentor. Ruth, a wonderful professor, immediately connected me with Todd due to our similar research interests. At the time, there were no Teams or even Skype, so email conversations were the go-to communication method. We immediately connected, and I began to share ideas and questions related to directional microphone systems and other noise management solutions employed in hearing aids. Todd went out of his way to share everything he knew or was working on to help me quickly get up to speed on theory, practical implementation, and measurement methodologies. His help was awesome and motivational, creating the spark of curiosity and exploration I still carry today.

Upon completing my PhD, Todd invited me to participate in hearing aid measurement ANSI meetings, his one flaw, which happened to be hosted in Cancun, Mexico. Who could say no to this southern paradise, especially for the pursuit of science? As usual, the meetings started in an enclosed room, ripe with the enthusiastic smells of engineers and scientists, leading to a six-hour heated discussion over using one word in a technical standard definition. Afterwards, we continued to talk about related topics related to our discipline and enjoyed dinner and a cruise on a mock pirate ship with Ruth Bentler.



This mix of work and pleasure defined many hours of our work together. I remember Todd once mentioning how it was hard not to talk about work during social hours when it is also your hobby.

When I joined the industry with GN in 2003, Todd continued his tremendous support even though jumping ship from academia to industry was frowned upon that day. Our collaboration and friendship continued growing as we pursued many joint projects, conference collaborations, and heartfelt and deep discussions over the next 20-plus years. One of the earlier projects we worked together on stemmed from a notion in the hearing aid industry that expanding the frequency bandwidth was not critical for hearing-impaired users and, thus, a cutoff at 6 kHz was acceptable. We disagreed with this notion and sat down together over a choice of beverage to devise a plan to test our hypothesis that frequency bandwidth was important, especially to certain subpopulations within the hearing aid community. This study, entitled “High-Frequency Amplification and Sound Quality in Listeners with Normal Through Moderate Hearing Loss” become one of our most quoted pieces of collaborative work (Ricketts et el. 2008).

Todd is a wonderful professor and a very tremendous individual to the field of Audiology and Hearing Science. He is also an amazing friend who has inspired and challenged me with many ideas while daring to cross into many controversial topics. However, we might have our own opinions that, at times, conflict, all of our discussions are based on the intent to understand each other’s viewpoints, even if we do not necessarily agree with them. This makes such an excellent conversation. I am fortunate to have such a collaboration with Todd for so many years. But most important, by far, is the great friendship we developed and continue to enjoy. Thank you, Todd, for being a tremendous person. I leave you with a couple of pictures of great ideas that have transpired and resulted in many great memories.





Reference

Ricketts TA, Dittberner AB, Johnson EE. High-frequency amplification and sound quality in listeners with normal through moderate hearing loss. J Speech Lang Hear Res. 2008 Feb;51(1):160-72. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2008/012). PMID: 18230863.