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Interview with Don Juran

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Don Juran
(Interviewed on 2 May 1991, Wilton, Connecticut)

Video Roll #13

Q: How would you like your name up there on the screen and, and how should we identify you?

DON JURAN: Don Juran.

Q: Don, Donald?

DON JURAN: Don.

Q: And relationship?

DON JURAN: I'm the son of J.M. Juran.

Q: There, there are four, there are four children.

DON JURAN: That's correct.

Q: How, how do you fall into the, where are you in the...

DON JURAN: I'm the last of four and the other three are bunched together in age and I'm, then there's a ten-year hiatus and then there's me.

Q: Ten-year gap?

DON JURAN: Oh yeah.
Q: So you, is it fair to ask how old you are?

DON JURAN: I'm 50.

Q: I'm a contemporary. When's your birthday?

DON JURAN: March 17.

Q: Ha, October the 18th. Same as Lee Harvey Oswald. Don't know.

Of, of all your brothers and sisters you probably are, grew up most aware of, of who your father was in the world.

DON JURAN: That took a while to happen because I, he's, from what I can remember his eminence, which was, that's all, that's the wrong word but his, his fame started to become a, manifest to me around the time of his first trip to Japan in 1954. And so at that point I recognized that this was something special. Not everybody gets to do that. I was thirteen at the time.

But it took, again, it took a good many years even after that before I realized how pre-eminent he was.

Q: The thing that we hear most constantly about your father is that here was a man who was, was driven by a number of ghosts in one area and by a real need on the one hand, to escape poverty, a need to provide a level of security that he never felt as a child. And then driven by a challenge to, to literally to succeed, to make something major of himself. Obviously that had involved lots of hard choices.

Now I don't know, I didn't have a father like that myself. Did that mean he wasn't around to play baseball and go to Little League games and things?
DON JURAN: He wasn't around that much. Especially when his consulting practice started to take off. I remember he'd leave a lot of, he'd be gone a lot of weeks. He'd be leaving on Sunday afternoon and returning on Friday afternoon. There was some of the, you know, you know, father-son activities. There wasn't much. We didn't have a lot of outings. Once in a while we'd go to Yankee Stadium. I do remember that he would go out to play catch in the yard and he wasn't good for that many minutes and he'd want to stop. Whether he wanted to get back into work or whether he was getting tired, of course he's thirty-six years older than I am. So by the time I was getting involved in sports he was in his middle and late fourties.

I do remember that competitive games he loved and always wanted to play with me. Could be, we, card games. We did a lot of that. Table tennis. He was a pretty good player and I got good. It was very funny because I started to play, I guess I was about six years old and I could barely see over the table. And he'd spot me fifteen points and beat me pretty easily. And I improved and I, we got to the point where he couldn't spot me fifteen and we dropped it to ten. And eventually I could do that. And five, and then we played even for a couple of years. And finally we got to the point where I was beating him pretty regularly. And I very timidly once offered to spot him five points and he just would not hear of it. He didn't want any part of that. He was, he was insulted.

Q: How wonderful that must have felt, finally. The first win must have been pretty sweet.

DON JURAN: Yeah, yeah. That was.

Q: Are you a chess player?
DON JURAN: A, that's another story. The, I never got to the, anywhere near the point he had gotten when he was in his twenties but there was a period when I was playing a lot of chess. I was in my early twenties. And we had played when I was little and he'd give me a queen or a queen and a rook or whatever it was, and still wipe me off the board.

But we hadn't played in years and he hadn't played a game in years. So I decided to play him a game even up. And I was only trying to get a draw, just simplify and keep exchanging pieces and get to the point where there was nothing left but a couple of kings on the board. And he blundered and allowed himself to get, he lost his queen. And liter, one would expect him to resign the game at that point and he wouldn't. He made me go all the way through to the checkmate. (LAUGHS) It was very funny. He was, losing was something he didn't enjoy particularly.

Q: That must have been sort of interesting. I know that in playing with some people, that it, how they play a game is really a very keen insight into their character. What does that, you know, what does that say to you about your father?

DON JURAN: He just doesn't like to finish second and he's, I don't know exactly about, what it says about his character but he, everything he does he does with intensity.

Q: When you were born, of course your, your next oldest sibling was a brother?

DON JURAN: That's correct. That was Chuck.

Q: How does it actually run, Don? Because I'm not quite clear. You're the youngest.

Page: 4

Don Juran (2 May 1991)
DON JURAN: Okay. Bob is the oldest and was born in 1928. Sylvia was born in 1930 and Chuck in 1931. And I was born in 1941.

Q: So how many kids were left in the house at that point?

DON JURAN: At which point?

Q: When, when you were first, when you were growing up, your first, was everybody still at home?

DON JURAN: They were all there. Bob was the first to leave. He, I don't know whether he finished high school or not but he and my father were not getting along well and he left. And I think World War II was just about over and he wound up in the occupation forces in Japan which would have been in early 1946.

Q: Which of the, who is Joy's father?

DON JURAN: Joy's father is Bob.

Q: Was Bob. What was it like growing up in the, in the Juran household in those days?

DON JURAN: Well, (CLEARS THROAT) in the early days there was a lot of activity with, you know, the oldest siblings there. You know, there were teenagers and teenagers are, I've got a couple of my own now, teenagers are off the wall at best. And Bob and Sylvia were having a lot of teenage difficulties, self image and all that.

Chuck was much more of a, how shall I say this? He got along with people a lot better than the other two did. I had a lot of brother and, older brother-younger brother activities
with Chuck which in some ways filled the void that my father's profession left.

Q: Was, was this at a time when, because I understand that there was a, there was some economic difficulties at one point. And then at a given point there was no longer economic difficulties.

DON JURAN: Right. My father decided to create this profession of management consulting. And nobody ever heard of this before. And for, I wasn't, you know, this didn't impact me very much. But for a while, and I've, this is only what I've heard, is that at one point we had a leak in our roof and we didn't have the money to pay it, to get it fixed. But the, you know, he took a big chance in not being an employee anymore and to start this profession, and it worked. It took a while but it worked.

And I think the first time I was aware of any degree of plenty was when they came back from Japan and here were the, the suitcase filled with all these, these treasures. This, this ivory chess set which was just, I'd never seen anything like that. It was beautiful.

Q: It's not like growing up, I guess, with Cary Grant as your father or Joe DiMaggio. It wasn't that level of....

DON JURAN: Oh no. No, not at all. You know, people didn't, you know, the man in the street didn't know who he was and I was not a, even aware of his being any kind of a celebrity until I was in college, when I had friends who were studying industrial relations and you know, they said oh, I, there was a reference to an article by one J.M. Juran, is that a relative of yours? Yes, that's my father. And, and that's really been most of what it is in the past. Eve, even, even
recently, you know, people will say is this, is this your father? But it's, in, his profession is somewhat narrow.

Q: Are you in any related business?

DON JURAN: Oh, I wouldn't say that at all.

Q: What do you do?

DON JURAN: I'm a computer specialist for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And there was, they talk about quality but a lot of it's talk. There was, the, the government is trying more and more to improve the quality of what they do. But they have a ways to go.

Q: We all wish them luck in that endeavor.

DON JURAN: Absolutely.

Q: As you look back, you know, over your relationship with your father, what are, you know, what are some of the most pleasant of the memories that will tell people who view this videotape, you know, what the guy's like?

DON JURAN: Well some of them are, one in particular, my father had quite a temper and I was very intimidated by him. But I found that if I could make him laugh the anger, it would just dissolve immediately.

I remember one instance, I was in the service. I was in my middle twenties and I came home. They were living in one of the apartments in Manhattan at the time. And we had the task of cleaning off the terrace furniture. And I even remember what he was wearing. He was wearing a, you know, a, a golf type shirt and a powder blue collar. And I'd been out on the
terrace cleaning the furniture off and I just closed the nozzel, tightened the nozzel to, and of course we still had a charged hose there, and the hose had been attached in fact to the kitchen faucet. And I go in there and he starts to unscrew this thing. And I tried to tell him that he really does, doesn't want to do that just yet. We need to drain the hose first. But he, he didn't want to listen to that. Of course he unscrewed it and the whole thing exploded water all over him. And he started to get angry but we, we both, we both cracked up.

Q: *You could see that one coming.*

DON JURAN: I could see, I could see it coming. (LAUGHTER)

Q: *(UNCLEAR) There is a sense of humor in there. Because we keep waiting for us to tell us a joke.*

DON JURAN: He's very good at it.

Q: *Really?*

DON JURAN: Oh, he's a super joke teller.

Q: *We'll have to do that next time.*

DON JURAN: He doesn't do it often but, at least not to me, but...anyone who has done as much public speaking as he has done is going to be somewhat comfortable with that.

Q: *Now here's a guy who is obviously real smart and, and intellectual. Did you find, was he a help, you know, doing math at home? Or....*
DON JURAN: I didn't need a whole lot of help with math. I didn't find math any kind of challenge until I went to college and then he wasn't there to help. One thing I had a problem with was, of all things, industrial art, which we called shop. And I don't remember the subject but I asked to, asked him about one thing and he just, he delivered a lecture just as if he'd been pre, preparing for the thing for, for a week. You know, of course from no notes or anything but, and I'm, I remember furiously writing everything down. (LAUGHS)

Q: Did you...has your relationship with your father changed as time has gone on?

DON JURAN: Very much. It's just gotten better and better. I don't feel that we were particularly close when I was a teenager or when I was in my early twenties. My father has very strong ideas as to what is the right way to live and is -- again, I should say was -- is not very tolerant of deviations.

Q: Our generation grew up with a lot of weird stuff at that, various times. I mean we grew up in I guess through the whole LSD and drug, the whole '60s. We were really kind of reaching our adulthood in that. I know that certainly gave my parents a bit of pause. Long hair, beard. And your father certainly had been, if nothing else, seems like a very conventional guy.

DON JURAN: In many respects he is.

Q: Your own perspective of, I mean it, those times when you explain to the world or to a friend or somebody, who
your father is, what, what, what do you find that people are most fascinated about, about the man?

DON JURAN: The self control is one of the amazing things. How he could, I remember my mother telling that, when he had some abdominal surgery and he insisted on watching it. They gave him a regional anesthetic and set up a mirror. He had to see this. I don't know anybody else who could, who would want to do that.

Q: My god. Let's change the tape.
: I've never heard that story. (MIKE OFF)

Video Roll #14

DON JURAN: ...the, the token....

Q: Equal opportunity verbal....

DON JURAN: Yeah, I guess. Yeah.

Q: Hippie, beatnik.

DON JURAN: That may be their own interpretation. But yeah. I've been around long enough that, you know, there, there's no, I can't get away from there and they can't get rid of me there, so....

Q: That's like that movie with Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier with the two...

DON JURAN: The Defiant Ones.
Q: Yeah.

DON JURAN: Yeah, I just, I just saw that recently.

Q: Really?

DON JURAN: God, what a brilliant movie that is.

Q: Chained to these guys for life.

DON JURAN: Yeah.

Q: You had said that, that the relationship has gotten better. I mean has it, are we talking about the sort of narrow, what everybody goes through with their parents?

DON JURAN: A lot of it is that, the rebelliousness and I wanted to make decisions and he wanted to censor those decisions. And a lot of this is just beside the point now. I've carved out a life and I'm not a young person anymore.

Q: Yes, we are. (LAUGHTER) Go on. I, I get the sense, Don, that you obviously are not totally comfortable just in the environment and, you know, how much to share and how much not to share. Your father is obviously a public figure, you know, within a certain context. I don't want you to go public or, or expose anything that you're no comfortable with. Are there some areas that you've, that we haven't talked about that, that you think would be interesting for people who see a videotape like this who only see your father either on the videotapes we've produced or, you know, on the lectures or a seminar that's conducted, that would give them some insights into how your father got to be the way that he is or the, the astounding sense of, of pressure he feels to do substantially
more. Here's a guy who hasn't packed off and gone to Florida.

DON JURAN: No, he never will. He'll, he'll be, he'll be working. Well, it's a, as he says, the distinction between working and not working doesn't exist for him. Studs Terkel puts it a very nice way. Work is what you're doing when you'd rather be die, doing something else. And he's doing exactly what he wants. So he's not working. But he's very, I've rarely seen such a level of energy in, and in someone of any age.

Q: Is he possessed? What, why, I mean he has as much money as he, I think he probably needs.

DON JURAN: He doesn't have, he's not a spender of money. He doesn't have expensive tastes particularly. I mean he'll go first class and all that but he doesn't need a great many gadgets.

Q: What do you think drives him these days?

DON JURAN: I don't know. Part of it might be the relationship with his father, which of course I'm not privy too. Maybe he's got to prove something of his, of his worth.

Q: What were the legends that you grew up with? Did he, did he talk about any, here's a colorful, you know, story, you know, immigrant boy.

DON JURAN: The, yeah. He, most of what I remember about what he told me about his youth was that he was, he was harassed a lot by the other kids. He had, he had a tough time with his father. And of course he lost his mother at an early
age. So, there was a lot of loss. His father was a pretty rejecting person from what I can understand.

Q: We asked him who was the most dominant figure in his life?

DON JURAN: I'll bet he said his mother.

Q: He did. You're right. Why do you think that is?

DON JURAN: He's got this, perhaps idealized view of -- of course I didn't know his mother -- but idealized view of her as somebody who is totally unselfish and totally self sacrificing. And he venerates her.

Q: Does that view of women extend to his own marriage?

DON JURAN: I don't think so. In many ways my parents live very independent lives, lives independent of each other. You know, he's busy with what he does and they have a pretty big house. Just the two of them are in it most of the time. And she does what she does and they see each other at meal times and I suppose in the evening.

Q: You have teenagers, you said. How have you used your relationship with your father to reflect a relationship that you have with your children?

DON JURAN: Well, I've tried to spend more time with them than he did with me. I'm not all successful. I've my own activities, too, which I do very intensely. My job's not one of them. My job is safe and secure but it does not provide a great deal of outlets for creativity. So I, I do other things
and I just don't let anything interfere with those. Much the same way my father has done.

Q: Do as I say, not as I do?

DON JURAN: It's...it's very hard to escape these patterns.

Q: How about brothers and sister, you know, your brothers and your sister? How are their lives affected by the home you've grown up in?

DON JURAN: Bob very, very strongly. As I, his relationship with our father is, had a lot of hostility in it to this day. And it's, there's a lot of sorrow in that. The incredible thing about Bob is how much he resembles his father. Could be very arbitrary. He's got a tremendous sense of humor. He wants things his own way.

Q: And the other kids?

DON JURAN: I think Sylvia is more affected by a relationship with, with her mother. Chuck was more of a pleaser. He wanted to get along and he wanted to be liked and he, he kind of side stepped a lot of the -- I'm trying to find the right word. My father could be very demanding, very intimidating. And Chuck was just very good at avoiding those punches.

Q: One thing that your father said as we talked about this, he, and he talked about writing his own autobiography and he felt the one thing that he got from his mother was a, a very strong sense of, of ethical behavior and the need to tell the truth. And he really got emotional, interestingly at one point, which is what we were talking about when you walked in.
And he said one of his biggest regrets was when he was very young and it looked as though he was not going to be able to go back to college, and he worked as a scab in a railroad company, and he was faced with this moral dilemma. Don't go back to school but do the ethical thing or do what was unethical but provide salvation. And, he welled up and he, literally tears filled his eyes and he said to this day I regret being a scab. And...

DON JURAN: I had no idea of any of this.

Q: It's fascinating to do this. Obviously if there's, there's a need to establish some level of trust. I think what will make this effective, certainly for your, from your father's perspective is, is that there is an honesty about this. He clearly has regrets about unavailability as a father, the driven quality that his life has taken.

DON JURAN: That hurts. And it always will. By the same token, there's some wonderful things about him. Part of it is the honesty. I've known few people with his level of ethics. And it's something I'm very proud of. I can't measure up to it. But I don't think peep, I don't think very many people could.

Q: When the door open and you stood there I, it might not be even fair to say this to you, I waited for you to touch. I waited for a handshake. I waited for an embrace. I don't know how long its been since you saw your father.

DON JURAN: A week.

Q: Is there very little physical contact in your family?
DON JURAN: It doesn't come easily. I didn't like physical contact when I was little. I don't know why. It's not a problem now with, within my own nuclear family it's certainly no problem. And with Chuck's family there's lot of this. You know, just had a get together on the occasion of Chuck's sixtieth birthday last weekend and just, you know, hugging all of his kids who are adults and whatever spouses are involved. And with my wife's family also.

Q: Because you look to me like a hugger.

DON JURAN: Oh yeah.

Q: And I, I was waiting for it.

DON JURAN: I guess I perceive him as not being one.

Q: What do you think would happen if you did it, if you just....

DON JURAN: He'd respond. He'd respond positively.

Q: There is something I know in just, in having worked with him as we have over the years, there's a little bit of a wall there. And I, you can walk up to that wall but he is Dr. Juran. He's not Joe yet.

DON JURAN: It's, it amazes me sometimes that, you know, in his career he's had to be a people person. This is what he preaches. But it doesn't come naturally to him. He has to, I think he has to force himself.

Q: How about your mother? Did she counter balance the, how was the dynamic in, in your house, growing up?
DON JURAN: She was more of a people person. But she had her wall also. I remember one instance where we were going to go to Yankee Stadium and I had dawdled around and not gotten ready in time. And my father was ready to call the whole thing off. And I was not, I was just, I was crushed. You know, how, how could he do this? And I remember my mother interceding and saying you know, it really means a lot to him. And he, he gave in and we went.

Q: It must be difficult for him to be so perceptive and focused when it come, comes to, you know, business solutions. And yet this, is this a blind side, tunnel vision?

DON JURAN: It's a blind side for everybody. Nobody understands their own family. And certainly he's no exception. It, it's all the more dramatic with him because of his, how perceptive he is for the non-family situations. But it's true of therapists. My wife's a therapist and I, I can see very clearly things that she doesn't see in the family. And I'm sure the reverse is true as well.

Q: Did you ever, back there, you know, in, waiting when you thought you were going to go to Yankee Stadium but worried that you might not, did you ever think that there would one day be a Juran Institute? I mean you walk, come into this building and you look around, I mean...

DON JURAN: Never occurred to me. And I got here today and I saw the sign, said why didn't I bring a camera? I'm sure there are pictures available but I felt very proud. Even though I had nothing whatsoever to do with the creation or maintenance of the organization.
Q: So this is your first time here?

DON JURAN: This is my first time here.

Q: What kind of relationship do your children have with, with the Doctor?

DON JURAN: They'd love to see more of him. He's, I remember one instance with my second son who has struggled somewhat in school. He's a very bright, imaginative young man but he's, does not stay on task well and his grades have reflected that problem. I remember, I don't remember where this happened but the two of them got together and my father just started giving him a lecture on keeping up with his school work and I guess my son was very embarrassed and so was I and I confronted dad with this subsequently and he said yeah, that was, that was not very smart.

Q: I guess you have to earn the privilege of being able to say those kinds of things.

DON JURAN: Yeah. The, they're, he's not close enough. He used to come visit us for a few hours at a time. He'd take a, he and my mother never traveled together. When she would visit us it would be for several days. We'd pick her up at the train and then deliver her back there. But what he would do totally independently and, you know, they'd never be together, he'd take the plane in the morning and we'd get him to the airport in the late afternoon or early evening, whatever it was. And we'd spend a few hours and we'd do this every six or eight weeks, something like that.

Q: Kind of like a business trip.
DON JURAN: Ver, good point. Yeah. I, I just check, okay. Okay, accomplish this task. Visit grandchildren. Check one more off.

Q: *Is there a*, one incident you can think of, you know, through your whole relationship with your father that somehow sort of crystallizes the whole thing that would, you know, for you that nuclear event that says this is like all the other things. *This is the, our whole relationship summed up.*

DON JURAN: I don't think there's anything quite like that.

Q: *Ever get close or a cluster of them? You know, say boom, what are the two or three things that, that define your relationship with your father?*

DON JURAN: I just can't put the relationship into one phrase which I can then find an example of.

Q: *How about a good group of adjectives? I mean how would, how would you describe the guy?*

DON JURAN: Okay, as a, as a father, demanding but love was there behind all the gruffness.

Q: *What do you think will be his biggest regret about, has he ever, has he ever articulated it to you?*

DON JURAN: I suspect it will be his, the failure of the relationship between him and Bob. That, that hurts him. And it, and there's nothing he can do about it. At this point I don't think Bob would be willing to re-establish that.
Q: Do you recall that, was it an event that was so hurtful or just a succession of things?

DON JURAN: It was a lot of things. I remember once they, they had a very brief and almost ludicrous fist fight. It was, it was in the house in Tuckahoe, so it would have been, I was probably about 14, 15 years old. And of course they weren't really swinging for anything up, other than their upper arms. So...it was a very strange feeling what, you know, watching them, watching all that hostility.

Q: Real sad.

DON JURAN: Pardon me?

Q: I guess that's the sense I get of this, the sadness of it. I mean here is, it's like somebody telling you Santa Claus is having problems at home.

The last thing. You, you call the agenda. You understand the purpose of the tape that we're making. What have I not asked you about that you think absolutely ought to be a, on a videotape about this man? And maybe if you don't tell us nobody will.

DON JURAN: I'll need a few seconds for that.

You know, he was always, it was very important that, that we learn to work. That we have chores and we, we do them. Chuck was pretty good at this. And he responded very positively to that. Bob had a lot of trouble with that. That's one of the sources of frictions. It's one of the sources of friction between Chuck and Bob now. Chuck wound up doing a lot of Bob's work as a result. I had trouble with, with doing chores, some more than others. I was not a particularly strong, physically strong kid. And I don't think he took that
into account. I had a thyroid deficiency and so I didn’t grow very tall very fast and, you know, I was over, I was very overweight.

Eventually this got diagnosed and treated and it’s okay. But during the interim I don’t think he was very understanding about it. Of course he didn’t know. I had it a lot easier than the other three. Mom and Dad were ten years older by the time, than, than they were when the other three were born. There was only one to deal with and there was more money. So it’s as if they had two separate families and I was this, I was the second.

Q: If there’s one thing you could rewrite in, in the history of your family, what would you rewrite?

DON JURAN: By rewrite, you mean what?

Q: Change. Wave a magic wand.

DON JURAN: Like....

Q: What would you make different?

DON JURAN: I’d want more time with him than in...

(OFF MIKE)
Q: It is. Thank you. (END)