



## Personal Reflections

10/18/2018

Dear IMSA Family,

As many of you know, Dr. Leon Lederman, founding father of IMSA, Nobel Laureate in Physics, former Director of Fermi Lab, husband, father, teacher, and mentor, passed away on October 3, 2018. Dr. Lederman belonged not only to IMSA, but to the world. We mourn his loss. And today, I am taking a short pause from my regular Personal Reflections to share with you how Dr. Lederman has impacted our lives.

I am the first President of IMSA who never had an opportunity to meet Dr. Lederman personally. Two years ago, during our 30th anniversary, I read much about IMSA's history which included stories of "Uncle Leon." I read words he penned and spoke during previous IMSA Convocations and viewed some of his videos. From these, I took away that Uncle Leon was not only brilliant, but also humble. He loved to joke, to teach, and to mentor. Not getting to know him personally was my loss.

Last week on the eve of his passing away, we realized that many of our students might not have known who Leon Lederman was, nor his importance to IMSA. In addition to creating a display in the Information Resource Center, we held an assembly to remember Uncle Leon, and explain his importance to IMSA. After the assembly, our IMSA students (and staff) wrote "care cards" to send to the Family of Dr. Lederman. Here's a [link](#) to the short assembly. Some of our students wrote:

- *IMSA is the most positive, incredible, and inspiring journey I have ever been a part of. It has opened countless doors and taught me time and again through its ideology that the world is mine to influence and change for the better. All this is thanks to the work of Dr. Lederman.*
- *If not for this school, I'd probably not even have a sprinkle of an idea for what I'd want to do in my future...I am going to be a first generation student to graduate (well, at least I plan to, I'm still here ha ha) from college...I am on that road because I made the choice to come here.*
- *Hearing Dr. Lederman's story, his passion for the future, and his dedication to improvement genuinely made me find purpose in my worth again. He is my inspiration to work harder and refuse to accept any kind of plateau in progress.*
- *IMSA has changed my life in almost every way. The opportunities, faculty, staff, and students that I've interacted with for three years made me realize my goals in life. I found myself here, and this place has prepared me to leave my mark on this world in the biggest way possible. Thank you for making that possible.*
- *Dr. Lederman has affected my life...one of the main things I do at IMSA and go to IMSA for is particle physics, so it's pretty wild when the stuff I'm learning is what Dr. Lederman discovered himself, and is exactly what he intended for us students to learn here at IMSA.*



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- *For a really long time I never thought I was going to find a place with people like me. I never thought I was going to be in a class where a teacher really wanted me to learn, not just pass a test. I am beyond grateful for IMSA, where I've started to really learn again and I've made closer connections in 2 months than I did in a whole year. Thank you Dr. Lederman for giving me this opportunity.*
- *As a senior at IMSA, I very much value the opportunities I have been given by this school, and I cannot imagine who I would be without IMSA. I will strive to never stop learning and working to advance science, as that is what IMSA has taught me.*

This assembly taught me that our IMSA students and community needs to be reminded in systematic ways about Uncle Leon. While I often quote, "Enrolling in Our Possibility," IMSA's philosophy as coined by Dr. Lederman and adopted by our Board of Trustees, nothing is more powerful than hearing Dr. Lederman recite the philosophy himself.

*If we do what we know and feel is right, it is bound to happen that among our graduates there will be numbered scientists, engineers, and those who go on to earn degrees in law and letters. There are likely to be those few who create new intellectual worlds, cure a dreaded human ailment or in some other way significantly influence life on our planet. Our philosophy will be to treat our charges as if each one is capable of this extraordinary achievement. Only one such product will make the effort and expense of this school for its entire duration worthwhile.*

We plan to use the video of Dr. Lederman reciting this statement as part of our staff orientation. And we plan to repeat this assembly at least once during the three years that our students are in the Academy. Otherwise, it will be our students' loss to not know or be aware of Dr. Lederman's role at IMSA and in their lives.

Some of you have asked me how you can make a contribution to IMSA in Dr. Lederman's name. The IMSA Fund has established the Leon Lederman Founders Fund to honor the life and work of Dr. Lederman. Charitable contributions to the fund can be made online [here](#) or by mailing a check directed to the Leon Lederman Founders Fund to The IMSA Fund, 1500 Sullivan Road, Aurora, IL 60506. All gifts are fully tax-deductible.

Whether or not you make a contribution, I encourage you to pause and reflect on the Lederman family and on what Dr. Lederman's life and legacy is for you and for IMSA.

Respectfully,

José M. Torres, PhD  
President