

ENTERPRISE BUILDING IN THE SOUTH ERNESTO MEJÍA AMAYA'S LIFE STORY¹

The current organization MAC S.A. is made up of the companies MAC S.A., MAC del Pacífico S.A., Coéxito S.A., Fundación MAC and Agromac S.A. They are all committed to achieving sustainable development through continuous improvement, environmental preservation and relations with the community. They also opt for having the highest quality, service, price and technology standards, fundamental factors to achieve competitiveness and to be leaders in the market.

MAC S.A. has been recognized as having the most important quality certificates²; and also received the ISO 14001 certificate for its environmental management system, relating to highly contaminating substance management, and also obtained the OHSAS 18001 certificate for its management system in occupational health and industrial security. On the other hand, it directly generates 1200 jobs and more than 5000 indirectly. All of this evidences a great commitment to the development of the company, the community and the environment.

This great organization was created by Ernesto Mejía Amaya, who was born on the 27th September, 1934 in Charalá, Santander, son of Ricardo Mejía Moreno and Victoria Amaya Vargas. He was the seventh of eleven brothers and sisters, a fairly large family who lived in the countryside.

Ricardo Mejía planned their departure during the era of La Violencia in Colombia, wishing to protect his family; "I would prefer my children to be peasants and not bandits". He chose Argentina because of a friend's comments about that country's beauty and prosperity, and because of a magazine about the Argentinian countryside called "La Charca". He sold all of his goods and left accompanied by his family. They arrived in Junín, a town in the province of Buenos Aires.

The Second World War had generated very high immigration of Europeans to Latin America, especially to Argentina, who arrived as excellent teachers in all fields. Ernesto Mejía studied so as to gain the right to work, because he was not allowed as he was so young. During the day he worked in the countryside, and at night he worked with an Italian immigrant, Miguel Sayas, who had a small battery factory.

The older brothers began to suffer from depression, and were nostalgic for their lives in Colombia, and so the only solution for this illness was returning to their native country. They decided to return to

¹ The Organising Committee of the North-South and the South-South Scientific Partnership International Workshop Seminar invited an important person from Latin America, an enterprise generator because of his own efforts, and with a wide vision of the future. Ernesto Mejía Amaya is an accurate example in this context. His presentation at the event made an intense impact on the participants, because of his simplicity, frankness and emotiveness on commitment to the community, the enterprise and surroundings. His immense capacity for future vision made a family business into a multinational, a leader in clean production, linked to the community, a model of quality and associated with university entities

² QS 9000, ISO 9001, Icontec's Colombian Technical Norm 978, Ford's Q1, Sofasa's EAQF Class: A and General Motors' QSP Award, amongst others.

Colombia, and locate themselves in Barranquilla, where they were not known, and did not have to hide the supposed “failure” which the journey to Colombia meant. When they arrived at the port of Buenaventura, they did not have money to continue, but by luck, some Chilean Jesuit seminaries decided to help the family with transport, and took them to Cali. José Antonio, one of the oldest brothers, had returned earlier than the rest of the family, and had found a house in the Popular neighbourhood, where all the rest settled in.

Ernesto Mejía had the chance to choose between two jobs, in a battery distribution shop (later Coéxito) or in a bicycle shop. For the battery distribution job, they were paying \$90, and \$110 in the bicycle shop. Ernesto Mejía decided to accept the \$90 because he saw more future in batteries.

Working for the company Distribuidora de Baterías, now Coéxito, he had an accident when he crashed into a truck on a motorbike. This happened on the 18th of March, 1957. He was taken unconscious to Social Security, where, against his father’s will, and under the responsibility of the medical surgeon Carlos Llano, he was operated on, and they found twelve perforations in his intestine. Two days later, Gustavo Villegas, Ernesto Mejía’s boss, offered him premises on the Carrera Octava, which at that time his father managed. He accepted the proposal, for which he had to pay \$4000 pesos, in instalments.

On leaving the hospital he did not go home, but directly to his new shop, where he had a bed. There, with the excellent electrician Ezequiel Peralta, he began his first business named “Servicio de Baterías”, on the 4th of April, 1957, where he did maintenance on the electrical part of the vehicles.

He married Carmen Cecilia Castro Serrano on the 4th of April, 1959. Ernesto Mejía knew a lot about batteries, he was an astonishing technician, but he did not have the administrative and accounting knowledge that running a business needs. There his wife fitted in perfectly, and she initially managed the business’s accounting.

In few year he was already the father of four children, María Fernanda, Diego, Luis Ernesto and María Consuelo, who later worked for the company.

In 1962 the business had grown and Ernesto Mejía decided to associate himself with his brother José Antonio. The company took the name Mejía Amaya y Compañía which changed to MAC S.A. in 1980. In 1970 the first battery factory was opened on the Carrera 1^a with Calle 38. Batteries began to be made on a large scale, and continual growth meant the plant had to be moved to Yumbo in 1975, where it still operates.

The factory grew, and the company in general reached the capacity of supplying not only this country, but also exporting automobile batteries to various different countries. Ernesto Mejía saw his company become a Colombian multinational.

In 1998 he wanted to show his family the place where he had lived, and where he had begun his technical training in battery making in Argentina. He traveled to Junín, with his wife, his four children, sons and daughters-in-law, seven grandchildren, and his brother José Antonio. He met his childhood friends there, saw the farms where he had worked, and his teacher, Miguel Sayas, who was like a

father to him. When he visited the old man, already bedridden, Ernesto's seven grandchildren climbed up onto his bed, and he welcomed them as if they were his own grandchildren. Ernesto Mejía cried when he heard Don Miguel say "Now I can die in peace", and his whole family cried with him. The founder of MAC S.A, handed over a symbolic key there to his children so that they would continue the legacy of an unequalled father and an untiring worker.

From his example, we can learn the value of the family, the importance of union, that constancy and perseverance in work are the key to success, and that a good life plan commanded by an excellent leader is the path to making our dreams come true. The tenacity, responsibility and vision with which Ernesto Mejía faced the obstacles that those who decide to undertake enterprise creation in the South generally find, are examples to follow