Are Engineers Romantic?

by **Ir. Oon Chee Kheng,** FIEM, P. Eng.

"YOU are an engineer? No wonder you are so square!" This statement says a lot about engineers. The perception is that engineers, who are trained to have an analytical mind, and are comfortable with drawings and numbers, are inherently unromantic.

One of my former female colleagues once told me that she was so touched when Leonardo DiCaprio, who played Jack in the movie *Titanic*, told Kate Winslet (Rose) that if she jumped off the ship, "I'm 'onna have to jump in there after you". This was followed by another scene from the same movie. When Titanic was about to go underwater, this time it was Rose who told Jack – and her words have become immortalised in the famous and off-repeated saying – "You jump, I jump!"

These commitment of love and trust would move many to tears.

I remarked in reply: "Hey, he just met her. How much do they know about each other to talk about love? If they did get married having just met on a ship journey, I can bet you one lunch that they would sure end up in divorce later!" The rejoinder, "Oh, come on, Chee Kheng. You are so unromantic!"

Yes, this former colleague of mine is an in-house lawyer with a listed company. Lawyers, as we know, "play" with words, while engineers are perceived to "play" with drawings and numbers. "Drawings" here do not refer to the paintings of, say, another Leonardo, with da Vinci as his family name. These are construction drawings which laypeople call "plans".

But, are engineers really unromantic? I remember once reading a report prepared by a government which was extremely worried of the unwed graduates among its population and was overzealous in having their graduates hitched. The theory, nay, hypothesis to be more exact, was that graduates, supposedly of higher IQ, would similarly produce children of comparable IQ. So the government began some sort of social engineering. And true to its *modus operandi*, to find the cure, you must first find the cause. To their horror, they found that the most unromantic professionals were the engineers!

As engineers, our works are functional, comprehensive and accurate. We are meticulous and analytical. Somehow, our works, or the nature of our works, do not make us romantic. If our government is like the one mentioned previously, maybe all our universities will have to introduce a course called, perhaps, "Romance 101".

But, then, what is the meaning of being "romantic"?

Waking up early in the morning and watch the sunrise together? Well, engineers can, through his creation, videotape and watch it at leisure while being together with his or her loved one.

Admiring a painting together? Well, engineers can do it better. We present the real thing.

Giving our loved one a surprise on Valentine's Day? Well, engineers are, by the very nature of their training, consistent. We are not immersing ourselves for only one day. We look ahead. Non-engineers can trust us for 365 days every year. Oops, sorry, as engineers, we are precise. And 366 days in every leap year!

We can go on. We may not be romantic in the usual sense of the word. But, this is transient in nature. Do you value your spouse for being romantic or for their dependability? For their sweet words or for their trustworthiness? Seeing them being lost when problems confront, or seeing them solve the problems? Wanting them to be superficial, or methodical and meticulous in analysis?

The answer is inescapable. At least we engineers will not be the romantics who buy Valentine's Day cards with the words "You are my one and only" in an economy pack of 10!

But, then, can, and will, engineers, who are practical guys, do the impossible and be romantic for their ladies? It was Rose in *Titanic* who said, "A woman's heart is a deep ocean of secrets."

So my conclusion is this, using the slogan of the civil engineering society of my *alma mater* at the University of New South Wales (it was obviously phrased by my mate who had just scraped through his paper on Concrete Technology and targeted at those who were doing other less important courses):

> *"Cement a relationship with a civil engineer and you will be set for life!"*

And this applies to engineers of all disciplines. ■