



MY MENTORS. Learning to Give Credit Where Credit is Due

Lucia Pasqualini (April 26, 2016)



Alberto taught me a basic rule of meritocracy: the importance of giving credit where credit is due. He taught me that one's reputation may be built day by day through concrete action; it does not derive from a role or position; an approach that I have found so deeply grounded in the American culture.



eri ero al Met per Elisir e ho provato i nuovi sottotitoli in Italiano. Brava, funzionano proprio bene. Io ero scettico ed invece Lei ha avuto ragione a portare avanti il progetto ed io sono felice che Lei mi abbia convinto a partecipare. Grazie. Alberto.

“Yesterday I was at the Met to see Elisir and came across the new Italian subtitles. Bravo. They work very well. I was skeptical, yet you were right to pursue the project, and I’m very happy that you persuaded me to participate in it. Thank you. Alberto”

I received this email from Alberto Cribiore just a few days after the opening of the Metropolitan Opera season back in September 2012. I had seen Alberto only a few times, and back then he did not even know who I was. I included his name on a list of people who might support a project for instating Italian subtitles for Italian operas at the [Met](#) [2], seeing as he is renowned for being one of the greatest opera lovers and one of the largest benefactors of the Met among the Italian community in New York.

2013 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of [Giuseppe Verdi](#) [3], and the Italian Consulate decided to commemorate Verdi with a special initiative. For many years, The Met had subtitles for the operas, and they were available in many languages, except Italian. That very peculiar omission has become the origin of a debate among many Italians living in New York. It was time to fill the gap.

That is why we made a proposal to introduce Italian subtitles exclusively for Italian operas, in order to facilitate people’s understanding of the original libretto and allow them to better appreciate the melody and beauty of the opera itself. After an exchange of ideas, Peter Gelb, the general manager of the Met [Peter Gelb](#) [4] accepted our proposal under the condition that we would be responsible for raising the funds for the project. We were not surprised at his request, and the Consul General assigned me to oversee the task.

It was my first fundraising experience, one that turned to be very illuminating and showed me New York from a different perspective. With the precious guidance of Lisa Calello, I started to think about all the people who love opera, the many Italian-American organizations and companies who could support a project of this magnitude.

I visualized this initiative to be an example of the cooperation among the different components of the Italian community in New York. In no time I’d received the support of Italians, Italian-Americans, and all of the prominent Italian-American organizations and Italian companies. There was only one name absent, yet it was a name I could not imagine missing from the list of numerous supporters: [Alberto Cribiore](#) [5]. His participation in the project held a very special meaning. I asked Lisa to contact his assistant to check if he received the letter of the Consul General and to stress the fact that his involvement in the project was very important to us.

A few days passed before I received a phone call from Alberto Cribiore. He told me that he was basically in favor of introducing the original libretto, as they did at La Scala in Milan, but skeptical about the outcome. He was afraid that it would have the effect of summarizing the text. I told him the agreement with the Met was to use the original libretto, and that I would personally oversee the realization of the project with the help of the Principal Conductor, Fabio Luisi. We had quite a fervent discussion, at the end of which Alberto consented to support the initiative. Nevertheless, when I hung up the phone, I wasn’t completely happy about the outcome. I had the feeling that I did not persuade him completely and that he only said yes because I was so insistent. This left me feeling a little bittersweet.

The email he sent me after the premier of Elisir was completely unexpected and made me realize that everything really is possible in New York. I would have never thought the Vice Chairman of Citibank would have taken his time to send me a thank-you note! With this very simple gesture, Alberto taught me many lessons. He showed me the strength of being able to change one’s mind, the importance of setting priorities and finding the time for everybody, and how a very successful executive operates.

In fact, Alberto did much more. During the Gala of La Fondazione in 2013, Alberto was awarded for his extraordinary commitment to the arts. On that occasion Alberto was interviewed for a short video



realized by the i-ItalyTV team, which was shown during the award ceremony. In front of the entire Italian community in New York, and in the presence of the Consul General, Alberto mentioned the project of the subtitles in Italian at the Met and thanked me personally for having taken the lead on the initiative. At that moment my heart stopped beating. I could not believe he was really saying that. I felt like everybody was looking at me, and they probably were! I was blushing. His words were so unusual for Italian standards and I was not used to being acknowledged in front of such a big audience. Now, I am aware that there was no reason to be embarrassed.

That night, Alberto taught me one of the most important leadership lessons of my life and a basic rule of meritocracy: the importance of giving credit where credit is due. He taught me that people are judged by results, and one's reputation may be built day by day through concrete action; it does not derive from a role or position; an approach that I have found so deeply grounded in the American culture. Thanks to Alberto, I have permanently incorporated this very simple rule into my private and professional life.

After the subtitles project he became very cordial toward me, and I started to see him with different eyes as well. Alberto is a very active member of the Italian community in New York and I usually met him solely during official events. He is not only involved with the Italian community; he is also the founder of the Bocconi Students Association in New York and has always been an important point of reference for the Consulate; he is a member of the Italian Welfare League and the Columbus Citizen Foundation.

I gradually realized how peculiar his circle of friends and contacts was for an Italian, born and raised in Italy. In fact, having understood the importance of working together, he is one of the very few Italians deeply in touch with the Italian-American community. For this reason I was not surprised to learn that Alberto accepted to be the Grand Marshall of the Columbus Day Parade in 2015. He is the first Italian born in Italy to have been granted the honor. Only a few Italian celebrities have ever been Grand Marshalls in the past. This happened in a different context and position. Being a Grand Marshall today implies receiving the honor and the responsibility to support the Columbus Citizen Foundation in its mission, and Alberto did that with great generosity and intelligence, aware of the fact that being part of the American culture involves becoming an active member of that circle.

Alberto is an extraordinary role model and a mentor for many Italians living in New York, including me. I am very grateful to him for the amazing example he has set for many people and on many occasions. You proved to me that exceptional people care about individuals and their personal growth. It is up to us to grow the seeds of the lessons that life offers us every day.

Grazie Alberto, il tuo esempio mi ha dato coraggio ed insegnato che osare con garbo, convinzione ed intelligenza funziona!

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