

# Rector for Higher Education shares the Tec's vision of philanthropy



*For someone who wants to set aside money to establish a Philanthropic Foundation or Fund, what does it take to make sure your resources are being impactful and truly effective? In this interview series, called “How To Create Philanthropy That Leaves a Lasting Legacy” we are visiting with founders of Philanthropic Foundations, Charitable Organizations, and Non Profit Organizations, to talk about the steps they took to create sustainable success.*

*As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Juan Pablo Murra Lascurain.*

*Juan Pablo Murra Lascurain is Rector for Higher Education at Tecnológico de Monterrey. His expertise in higher education and business provides a wealth of knowledge to craft innovative curriculums to prepare today’s students to become tomorrow’s leaders. An invested husband and father, he is passionate about education and the impact of leadership on institutional transformation.*

Juan Pablo Murra. width="900" loading="lazy">

**Thank you for making time to visit with us about a ‘top of mind’ topic. Our readers would like to get to know you a bit better. Can you please tell us about one or two life experiences that most shaped who you are today?**

Hard to pinpoint specific experiences, so I'll highlight a couple of broader opportunities. I had the opportunity to work and study in different countries throughout my professional and academic careers. I spent my junior year of high school in the United States and received my MBA from NYU Stern School of Business. I've spent summers in France and the United Kingdom and worked in the United States, Brazil, Russia and Colombia. Before coming to Tec, I worked as a consultant at McKinsey & Company for 12 years. It was a job that shaped my standards and how I think about opportunities and challenges. The ability to learn and live in different cultures has shaped my vision and my experience to consider different perspectives that I can apply to my current position as Rector for Higher Education at Tec.

I found out I was going to become Rector during the early stages of the pandemic when we made the decision to send students and faculty home. At the time, I was in my previous position as Vice President for Development & External Affairs at Tec. David Garza, who at that time was Rector for Higher Education, became President of Tec. I had several conversations with David about how I wanted to continue shaping my role at the institution, and we came to the conclusion that I would be a good fit for the role given my experience.

Being Rector is a central role at this institution and lets me take the lead in Tec's academic affairs. My responsibilities include attracting top-notch talent to our faculty and development, designing programs and educational experiences and research within each of our six schools: Engineering and Sciences, Business, Architecture, Art and Design, Sciences and Government, Humanities and Education, and Medicine and Health Sciences.

I also work on social impact programs that focus on lifelong learning programs, co-curricular activities, and student leadership programs. It was different from what I had been doing in the past — that's what made it exciting. Even with the challenges that a new role presents, entering this position was a dream come true.

**You are a successful leader. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? We would love to hear a few stories or examples.**

I still have a lot to learn as a person and leader, but I think that up to this point my intellectual curiosity is one trait that has helped me. Always be willing to ask questions, observe and learn.

The ability to work with others is another important trait. You have to understand that most of your impact is shaped by working with others. I always liked the image of Alondra de la Parra, a Mexican conductor, who said that she doesn't play the music — the musicians do. It's like I have this baton and my voice to inspire them to play music. As leaders, we need to understand that we don't play music. Make sure others have the right instruments, the tools, mindsets and inspiration to do so. The final trait is having high expectations and standards for my work. I have these expectations for others and encourage them to always think of how things can be done better.

**What's the most interesting discovery you've made since you started leading your organization?**

It isn't one specific discovery that I've found, but rather the capacity, talent and impact of our faculty which has been such a wonderful discovery. The relevance and quality of the projects our faculty lead is always a happy surprise. I recently learned that Tec has a professor who is responsible for and founder of a project called Buró Parlamentario (Parliamentary Bureau) that monitors and tracks the performance of the Mexican congress which I previously heard about, but I didn't know it was from a Tec faculty member. These types of discoveries are always happening on our campuses and it's thrilling to continue learning about all the interesting work happening here.

**Can you please tell our readers more about how you or your organization intends to make a significant social impact?**

Tec is a private, not-for-profit educational institution. We are an institution of society and for society. The quality and mindset of our graduates set us apart, and this is the biggest social impact that we make as an institution. We have nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students from our programs each year. Our students are the ones with the most impact in terms of entrepreneurship, with one out of 10 having started an NGO and 45% starting businesses at some point in their careers. An increasing number of graduates are serving in the public sector. So, I think the impact of our graduates is by far the largest one.

I also think that the way that we operate the institution in terms of our sustainability plans, is increasingly setting an example of how other large institutions can and should operate through a sustainability mindset. We use the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) to ensure our sustainability initiatives are aligned with the UN's 17 SDG objectives. There is someone at Tec who is conducting corresponding research on each of these objectives. With a large geographic footprint and close to 30,000 employees and faculty members within Tec, the breadth and depth of our work contribute to the impact our students and faculty will have on our communities from the local to international level.

Additionally, Tec's high-quality education scholarships access to world-class resources and opportunities through programs like Leaders of Tomorrow, a program that aims to open doors to young people from rural, suburban and indigenous communities to experience quality education at Tec through full-ride scholarships.

Finally, our research is generating the ideas, intellectual property and start-ups required to solve many of our communities' challenges.

Juan Pablo Murra. width="900" loading="lazy">

**What makes you feel passionate about this cause more than any other?**

Our chairman of the board was our commencement speaker and he said something very simple and obvious, but we tend to forget it, and it's that our purpose in life is to find our passion and our gift is to have an impact and transform the lives of others. I can't think of a better Mexican institution that touches so many.

We have 94,000 students, 10,000 faculty members and 330,000 alumni, along with the student's families and the companies that we work with as academic partners. If you do the math, we touch

the lives of millions in Mexico and Latin America. These positive exchanges are about the possibilities, research, innovation, and entrepreneurship people are exposed to at Tec. The people at Tec are happy and creating value.

**Without naming names, could you share a story about an individual who benefitted from your initiatives?**

Tec's executive team created an endowed scholarship called Leaders of Tomorrow. One of the students who received this scholarship is amazing — she comes from a family with little financial means but is incredibly committed and disciplined. This student comes from a high school funded by Alfa Fundación, the corporate foundation of Alfa Group. I actually worked on this school's design while at McKinsey, so I knew the quality of education there.

It's been incredible to see how this student has progressed since coming to Tec and the impact she has at the university and within her community. She is involved with her municipality and convinced the mayor of her municipality to donate to Leaders of Tomorrow. She also represented Tec at a UNICEF conference in Barcelona to discuss our leadership program and has started an NGO.

This student is someone who might not have had the opportunity to finish high school, but through her scholarship has excelled in school and beyond. She still has one more year until graduating from Tec, but her ability to transform our community and society is truly inspiring.

**We all want to help and to live a life of purpose. What are three actions anyone could take to help address the root cause of the problem you're trying to solve?**

Being conscious of the challenges we have as a society and as individuals is essential to understanding how to solve these problems. Recognizing that not everyone has the same beliefs, experiences or opportunities requires empathy to understand others on a deeper level. When you acknowledge these circumstances to understand inequality, poverty and sustainability, it's very hard to ignore. When you're aware of people's realities and their situations, it encourages your need to address these problems.

The second step is to act. Identify an NGO, project or initiative and start working to address the problem. I've seen cases where people are concerned about air quality or pollution or the lack of water, and the moment they find a space to participate, it automatically pulls them in. One thing leads to another and suddenly they have a tremendous impact in trying to address the challenges.

The third is to be generous with your time and resources. In Mexico, the percentage of people who donate is very small, and the amount they donate is small. As humans, we tend to see ourselves as victims and expect others to help rather than see ourselves as protagonists with the capacity to help others. When you have the opportunity to be generous with time and resources it should be done, and we need to do it more often.

**Based on your experience, what are the "5 Things You Need To Create A Successful & Effective Nonprofit That Leaves A Lasting Legacy?" Please share a story or example for each.**

- **Systemic perspective to solve problems.** I had the amazing opportunity a few years back to attend a seminar by the Academy for Systemic Leadership led by Peter Senge. He discussed that if you want to have a profound and long-lasting impact you need to think systemically and understand that most problems we're trying to solve don't depend on a single individual or entity. Instead, these solutions depend on multiple dimensions and institutions that need to find ways to collaborate.

An example of this that I like is about an NGO in Cincinnati that identified the state was investing billions of government funds, but this investment didn't translate into the impact they wanted. This NGO had a budget of around \$500,000 and used its knowledge of how the system worked and the key connections that needed to be made for the system to work better. If those resources were used more linear thinking through systemic perspective changes a system, then the funding or resources can create a longer-lasting effect.

- **Talent and passion.** Talented and passionate individuals are another key part of leaving a lasting legacy. Finding those who believe in the cause and are inspired and willing to work with them will amplify the impact.

- **Understand the problem.** The third key is to get in the weeds to know what issues are there and what caused them. Understanding the problem from the inside out requires you to learn what others are doing. You need to understand the problem, otherwise, you cannot solve it.

- **Global vision for impact.** Tec has and continues to leave a lasting legacy across Mexico. We are turning 80 this year and compared to some universities like Oxford and Cambridge we are very young but compared to other social programs and projects in Mexico, it's already almost half of the life of our country. We have the resources, talent and mindset to become a better institution for the next 100 years. We're thinking about how Tec can have more of an impact not only on Mexico but in Latin America and the world. The impact of every life we change multiplies when you consider the web our students' and faculties' families and businesses. The connections have already been established and they will continue to ripple for many decades, if not centuries.

- **Humanistic and conscious leadership.** Don Eugenio Garza Sada, a Mexican businessman and philanthropist, was a man ahead of his time. He developed and promoted a humanistic vision of how business leaders should build and develop their companies and highlighted the social role that those businesses played in the well-being of our society.

One of my favorite quotes from Don Eugenio is: "Profits are not a rent for selfish motives, but an instrument for reinvestment in social and economic development". He pioneered many business practices in favor of his employees, who he called 'socios' (Spanish for partners) because he invested the capital, and they invested their time.

Back in 1930, even before the Mexican government created social security programs, his companies supported through diverse programs the education, housing, health, and well-being of his employees and their families.

Don Eugenio's humanistic leadership and concern for society led him to launch and support different initiatives and institutions, among them Tecnológico de Monterrey. An institution of society and for society.

He shared these values and visions with other business leaders of his generation. Now, every leader should find ways to fit the current needs of our society and ask ourselves: "What does it mean to be a conscious leader today, in the 21st century?"

## **How has the pandemic changed your definition of success?**

Health and freedom are two aspects of our life that we took for granted prior to the pandemic and have become more present since then. There's been a shift in prioritizing these, and we should continue to maintain this new mindset.

Our physical and mental well-being is crucial to have the capacity for a good life and to flourish. It's become more important than ever to take care of your health.

The second one is freedom. During certain parts of the pandemic, our movement was restricted to prevent people from traveling or seeing family. While this was challenging, we made a collective decision to stop our economy to protect the lives of the most vulnerable. It reminds me of a speech by Markus Gabriel, a very well-known German philosopher, at Cátedra Alfonso Reyes, who said we demonstrated that we were capable as humans to make decisions based on morals and not only on economic elements. The pandemic has been a difficult time, but it's allowed us to see that we could make decisions not only from a market perspective but from a human and moral perspective.

## **How do you get inspired after an inevitable setback?**

I've always been inspired by human ingenuity and creativity, people who have struggled against all odds. I'm not saying that that's my case but finding examples of people who have done so is a good way to get inspired. If you know and believe what you're doing is important, then you'll keep trying until it gets done.

I speak with people I trust like my wife and friends to help recalibrate and regain my focus when I'm in a lull. Exercise, especially throughout the pandemic, is also a great way to work through any challenges to reframe my thinking.

## **We are very blessed that very prominent leaders read this column. Is there a person in the world who you would like to talk to, to share the idea behind your non-profit? He, she, or they might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)**

I would love to have a conversation with Barack Obama. He's a leader that I admire. I listen to his speeches and read his latest book. It's amazing how he can express his feelings and views every time something significant happens in the world, and I admire him for that. It would be incredible to talk about all the work and initiatives happening at Tec and how this energy and talent is changing the world, opening up new opportunities for collaboration.

## **You're doing important work. How can our readers follow your progress online?**

I like to be active on social media to connect with our community. You can follow me on Twitter at [@jpmurra](#) and on Instagram at [@juanpablo.murra](#). I also recommend following Tec on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

**Thank you for a meaningful conversation. We wish you continued success with your mission.**

*\* About The Interviewer: Karen Mangia is one of the most sought-after keynote speakers in the world, sharing her thought leadership with over 10,000 organizations during the course of her career. As Vice President of Customer and Market Insights at Salesforce, she helps individuals and organizations define, design and deliver the future. Discover her proven strategies to access your own success in her fourth book [Success from Anywhere](#) and by connecting with her on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).*

**??\* The interview was originally [published on Authority Magazine and to link back](#) to the original story.**