

Serving at Tec, greatest honor of my life - José Antonio Fernández



The Tec has been my second mountain, says José Antonio Fernández Carbajal, the outgoing Chairman of Tec de Monterrey's Board of Directors.

He says this a few minutes after the end of the institution's annual members' assembly, at which he passed the baton to its new chairman, Ricardo Saldívar Escajadillo.

By second mountain, Fernández Carbajal is referring to the concept used by Canadian American David Brooks in his book of the same name.

"When we leave school, we want to climb a mountain, which is that of personal development, getting a good job, doing well, and getting on in life," explains Fernández Carbajal.

"Suddenly, another mountain rises up in front of you (...)," he says. ***"That second mountain is one of vocation and interdependent working toward a cause."***

"It was just my luck that my other mountain appeared very close to me," he says, referring to his path at the Tec that began as when he was a student and professor over 40 years ago. ***"On this other mountain, changing lives, that's much better!"***



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The Tec and transforming lives

Fernández Carbajal recalls that **he started teaching at Tec de Monterrey just one year after graduating** with a degree in Industrial Engineering from the same institution in 1977.

One professor who had left a mark on him, Benito Flores, **recommended teaching to develop the skill of public speaking**, *“He said, ‘Look, you won’t make any progress if you don’t know how to sell your ideas. To do that, you have to know how to speak in public.’”*

Years later, when he was thinking about giving up the profession, he was reminded of the transcendence of teaching after bumping into a former student one day in New York and when another student’s mom cornered him at church another day.

“Never stop teaching. You don’t know how much you changed my son,” that mom told him.

“For me, the Tec has been the tool that most effectively transforms lives,” he says, reflecting on this.

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During his period as Chairman of the Board, Fernández Carbajal pushed hard for the creation of **the first scholarship to pay 100% of an undergraduate course for young people** with potential

for transformation and social impact: **Leaders of Tomorrow.**

He and Salvador Alva, then-president of the Tec, were inspired by the Colombian “*Ser pilo paga*” program to create this social support program for young people with great potential.

“I said to him, ‘Look, we have to be daring. The worst that can happen is that we end up going slower than we want to.’”

*“This idea inspired by the University of Los Andes was well received. It’s **one of the programs from the Tec that people are most excited about, and it makes the university more inclusive,**”* says Alva.

When talking about José Antonio Fernández, he adds, *“**His talent is outstanding, but his heart is transcendent. He’s a visionary, a transformer, and definitely a great humanist.**”*

Today, **Leaders of Tomorrow** has nearly a thousand students studying on scholarships and **728 more** who have already graduated.



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An outsider in Monterrey

José Antonio Fernández was born in Puebla. When the time came for him to go to college, **his dad** decided to send him to **Tec de Monterrey.**

“I knew so little that I turned up on June 5 in a leather jacket. I thought to myself, ‘This heat is unbearable. What am I doing here?’,” he recalls, smiling.

But *“I didn’t want to come to the Tec. I didn’t want to leave Puebla. My dad practically forced me to come here because he’d done his homework,”* he continues.

“I came here to study Mechanical Engineering. When I got here, there was a new degree in Industrial Engineering, and I had to talk to my dad. I went across the street to call him on a public telephone and ask for his permission to change from Mechanical to Industrial Engineering. I was in the first year group for Industrial Engineering.”

He says that **studying in another state taught him to look after himself better and grow up faster.**

However, he decided to stay in Monterrey after graduating. *“I came here committed to returning to Puebla. While I was here, I got married. So, I was convinced to stay.”*

Over time, Fernández gradually specialized in **Strategic Planning** and became more successful as a **businessman.**

In 2012, **he was appointed as the fourth Chairman of Tec de Monterrey’s Board of Directors,** only after **Don Eugenio Garza Sada, Eugenio Garza Lagüera, and Lorenzo Zambrano.**



/> width="1113" loading="lazy"> **Achievements and challenges**

“Today, I step down with a lot of pride and satisfaction for fulfilling the duties of this great opportunity that life has handed me,” he said last Monday, February 20, at the assembly where he stepped down from the chair.

Over the past 11 years, Tec de Monterrey has made **outstanding achievements** such as the creation of the **DistritoTec** urban regeneration initiative, **Leaders of Tomorrow**, and its rise in global education rankings, now being placed among the top 30 private universities in the world.

It has also had **important challenges** such as the effects of the **2017 earthquake** that rocked Mexico City and the Tec campus in that city, causing the unfortunate deaths of 5 students, or the university tackling the situation of the **COVID pandemic**.

In fact, the Tec was the **first Mexican university to suspend classes** due to the pandemic and was quick to start up remote learning in a manner that showed the way for other institutions.

Fernández also emphasizes **the work done during the pandemic by TecSalud**, Tec de Monterrey’s health system, with the **San José and Zambrano Hellion hospitals** in raising the bar for good treatment, low mortality rates, and supporting other institutions under the leadership of **Dr. Guillermo Torre**.

What’s more, **the Tec implemented its new Tec21 educational model during this period**, which pushes aside traditional education and ensures that students pick up the necessary skills based on **challenge-based learning**, making the Tec a **global point of reference**.

“We’re profoundly grateful for 11 years of dedication, commitment, and leadership.” - David Garza, Rector and Executive President of the Tec.



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Deeply significant to Fernández Carbajal over these years are the **changes** implemented in the institution’s **governance** to make it **more transparent and organized**.

Institutional governance and auditing committees were created, among others, and these set out clearer rules for joining the **board of directors on each campus**. What’s more, **the duration for being chair** of the Board of Directors itself **was reduced**.

“We had a self-imposed rule that it should be just two five-year periods, which I still think is fair. It’s fair to the Tec and it’s fair to the person.”

David Garza, Rector and Executive President of the Tec, had this to say on Fernández Carbajal’s work in an official statement sent to the Tec community.

“We’re profoundly grateful for 11 years of dedication, commitment, and leadership in this position, through which he led a significant transformation of our Institution, contributing to the consolidation of our leadership in Mexico and Latin America.”

Salvador Alva, former president of the Tec, said, ***“I learned from him how to see what’s really important and focus on that, as well as how to push ourselves and challenge ourselves to go***

further, to take the Tec to world-class levels.”

“José Antonio’s legacy,” adds Alva, “is the vision made real: leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship for human flourishing.”

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The Tec, his second mountain

In his book *The Second Mountain*, David Brooks explores the concept of a life of meaning, arguing that many people go through two phases: the **search for success and personal accomplishments**; and then that of a purpose through service to something larger than oneself.

Brooks describes four commitments of people who undergo this process: to a vocation, to a community, to a code of ethics, and to a transcendental cause.

Fernández Carbajal is clear that for him, that cause is education and the Tec.

“The best gift of my life that the Tec gave me was meeting my wife Eva and being able to start a family with her,” he stresses. After that comes the Tec: *“the greatest honor of my life.”*

“After I graduated, I was obsessed my whole life with how much I earned, which positions I held, and being promoted.”

“But every time a student said, ‘Thank you teacher. You helped me,’ that was the other mountain. And that gives you a satisfaction that nothing can buy.”

He promises that he will continue not only as a board member of the Tec but supporting this cause for the rest of his life.

“You can continue to count on my dedication, on my efforts to keep uplifting Tecnológico de Monterrey.”

“It’s my life now. I will remain at the Tec’s side until the day I die: donating, getting things done, teaching, and so on.”

“You can continue to count on my dedication, on my efforts to keep uplifting Tecnológico de Monterrey.”



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