

32. Francisco Celedon

Well, that is the culmination of a process, but a culmination that was also quite beautiful. Obviously, October 5th began much earlier, practically when I returned from self-exile in Venezuela, where I came to work and pursue my professional life because we all had to make a living. I came with Mr. Gabriel Valdés, who was the president of the Christian Democratic Party at that time and an active opponent of the regime, right? I actively joined his team in the party and in what was the CED (Center for Development Studies) at that time. I also worked in an advertising agency, which was my profession during those times. Since I worked in advertising and the strategy to face the 1988 plebiscite was being formed, I was asked to contact and form a creative team. So, with audacity and fear, I approached some people I knew more easily and others whom I didn't know. I have to contextualize: we were living under a dictatorship. Opening spaces of trust is not easy, especially when you don't know the person. And that's how it was. I talked to five or six people, and all six of them agreed to work on a project that wasn't very clear at that time. It was known that within a period of time, about a year, a year and a half, there would be a campaign. But nobody knew all the conditions, both the legal aspects and the political elements of that year.

But yes, I believe we managed to form a team that was quite solid in that creative aspect. Some were contacted by me, and others were acquaintances who worked in the advertising industry, which formed the basis of this endeavor. Overcoming political differences that were typical of the opposition at that time, we formed a group that eventually grew to include hundreds and hundreds of volunteers fulfilling different roles. We formed a great team of creatives and political scientists. We gathered some experience and support to conduct public opinion studies, surveys, focus groups, and so on. In that sense, it was a very professional job, and I believe we succeeded in making a very accurate diagnosis of the social state of the country at that time, in all its different dimensions: emotional, perceptual, psychological, and so on. It was a very comprehensive profile. I think that was the success of the campaign from a communication standpoint, and the communication campaign also influenced the political campaign. It was so powerful and relevant that once it started, during the month or so we had to air the campaign spots, it set the tone and effectively changed the mood of the country. And not only our coalition, but it also forced the government coalition to shift its strategy significantly, and that was very noticeable. Unlike them, we were able to maintain a clear and consistent communication line, that was quite well evaluated by us. Every night, after each of the campaign spots, we conducted focus groups to measure its impact.

Anyway, one of the many roles that fell to me was to collaborate in the production of the campaign spots. I'm not known for being creative, but I participated in almost all instances, both at the political level and within the creative production team. Along with Juan Gabriel Valdés and Patricio Silva—who unfortunately passed away several years ago—we were the representatives of the "No" option before the National Television Council. 48 hours before the program aired, we had to submit our tape for censorship. This routine lasted for about 30 days. Normally, we would submit it at 12:30 a.m., two days in advance. Initially, we were very disciplined and complied with the deadline. However, we later realized that if the tape had any technical errors, we could get an additional 24 hours. And since we didn't hand in the tape, or at least we believed so (although I am certain that they always made copies to share with the "Yes" side), we intentionally included some technical errors to return with that tape 24 hours later. That was the dynamic. And I believe, once again, that the campaign was extraordinarily

successful in delivering what the people and we ourselves expected. "Chile, la alegría ya viene" (Chile, the joy is coming) was primarily aimed at encouraging people to participate in the process, and despite the social tragedy the country was experiencing, it presented an optimistic campaign. While it was certainly highly critical of the government, it was an intelligent critique, so to speak. We didn't emphasize extremely dramatic situations because that would have inhibited people due to fear. We started with the premise that the more people participated, the less chance the dictatorship had of achieving victory.

So, within those 30 days, there was a milestone in which history made me the sole actor. It was the most uncomfortable milestone for us because one of the episodes of, honestly, I don't remember the details exactly. The censors simply said there was no possibility of reaching an agreement, they censored it. And they said that this episode would not air. It was because, for the first time, a judge was unprepared for this interview. I think his last name was Rojas, a judge of the Republic, and the judiciary power was controlled by the dictatorship. He acknowledged that torture and disappearances were taking place in Chile. Obviously, the authorities didn't accept that being made public, so it was resolved that the "No" option wouldn't air that episode. Therefore, it was a Friday. I understand. Only the "Yes" option was broadcast.

That meant for me—apart from being young at that time, and I still consider myself young at heart—I had to face it alone and appear in the news. Personally, it caused me a lot of problems because this was obviously a semi-clandestine job, a job in which one didn't receive any kind of remuneration. And at the same time, I had to work in a regular office, go to bed at three or four in the morning every day, and be in my office by eight-thirty or nine to work as usual. And continue the routine at night. Moreover, no production company, you understand what production companies with large teams and cameras are like, allowed us to work during the day; it had to be at night. I also believe that there was an economic issue involved because we had very limited resources. So, on that occasion, as it became news in all the media outlets, I became a public figure.

And at that time, I was working in a leading advertising agency here in the country, and I was responsible for managing the main accounts back then. Obviously, my work was clandestine. The owners, the companies, were all big business conglomerates in the country, and obviously, they were all right-wing and supportive of the regime. So, the experience was very remarkable. First of all, because most of the clients complained to the owner of the company, Juan José Barceló, who was also right-wing but quite moderate, actually a member of Opus Dei. And obviously, it was a big surprise as well. But he had already... I had already... I had already opened up to him in a very special circumstance because I used my lunch break to sleep, and I would sleep in my office. I had a private office like this one, with a large desk. And a bit larger, and I would sleep here, hidden, so no one could see me. And Juanjo, who was the owner, would often come to invite me to lunch. And one day, I was sleeping down there, obviously. And he sits down to leave me a note: "Pancho, I came to get you for lunch, dude, where are you?" Unconsciously, he kicks me. I wake up. We sit in an office similar to this one. I told him, "Juanjo, sit down, I need to talk to you. Because if I see you tired that day, you seem to have declined. What's going on?" And I tell him. And by then, the success of the "No" campaign was already in the spotlight, the truth, the success of it. Therefore, he, as a communicator and advertiser, said, "Look, Pancho, I respect your idea, I hold you in high regard, you are my trusted man in the company, you manage the accounts department. Anyway. But let's keep this obviously in silence, in secrecy. Otherwise, it will affect all our clients. So, he was already an accomplice to the situation. He told me, "Dude, come at nine-thirty when

you can. And if you can, let me know that you're sick, and you'll come at noon. Anyway, he gave me all kind of flexibility. With great pride in being part of the team, of a communication action that was very powerful in a way. Obviously, he didn't tell me, but I thought it was prestigious for the company in that field. But that day came when they rejected the episode, and I appeared in all the media, and the clients started calling Juanjo one by one. To tell him, "Dude, how could you have a communist involved if you know that he's the one in charge of the company's strategic plans?" I don't know, "if the communists win, they're going to..." It was a total rejection. All of them, my friends, well, friends, a relationship of trust. Indeed, it was a large company that I was in, and I humbly performed my job well. And because of my character and personality, it was very easy for me to establish complicity with my clients. I traveled with many of them, went to produce commercials outside of Chile, spots, and attended conferences in Europe. Well, I was very well. But they didn't want the communist there at their headquarters. Ah, and Juanjo too. The owner of the company told me, "Pancho, well", he went to each of the directors and said, "Gentlemen, you know my position not only politically but also religiously. But evaluate Celedón in his professional capacity, not in what he thinks". He gave the explanations, they took away our account, and obviously, I took a backseat in managing the clients I had. So that was my experience primarily, belonging to the "No" campaign itself.

That. I would say it was a moment of great, great camaraderie, of emotional camaraderie, a dream, right? Because neither we, when the coup happened, were 16, 17 years old, nor had we had any significant political experience. I was a student leader, but we hadn't actively participated in a mature democratic life. So it was a struggle for a dream, indeed. These dreams that nowadays, unfortunately, due to the evolution of the universe, have died down to a few uncertain reasons like that. That's why I said at the beginning that this is an unrepeatabe experience because it effectively changed the course of our country's history.

And humbly, one was just another soldier in that. Among many, among those who fell and gave their lives, so to speak. So, if you try to take me back to what October 5th, '88 was like, I would tell you it was a day of great anxiety, of much uncertainty, even more than we had experienced throughout that period. I left home early. I had to go to different polling stations. I remember. I was already married and had a child, and Valentina was still a little baby, she must have been a few months old, my second daughter from that marriage. And I think I went home for lunch and then returned to the "No" campaign headquarters, which was there, right there on La Alameda, in front of the Diego Portales building at that time. Nowadays, it's Gabriela Mistral. And we were there, well, for the rest of the afternoon, and there were moments of great tension because the power went out. They isolated the headquarters, the campaign headquarters. Obviously, Genaro acted, well, the leaders of that time, and we demanded explanations. We denounced the incident more internationally than locally, and it was a moment of extreme attention because of what it meant, and also because we were surrounded by police. Well, the incident probably lasted two or three hours, I don't remember exactly. And then, the power, the electricity, the energy came back.

And finally, the recommendation for that day was for us to go home around midnight. And there we saw the declarations of General Matthei entering La Moneda, which Pinochet had called for. Therefore, the real celebration took place the next day, on October 6th, on La Alameda. It was the great celebration of the citizens. We were going to celebrate. I would say that was the moment when we knew we had truly won because the previous night was filled with great uncertainty and rumors. We already had our own results, which were very close to the true ones. But we didn't know if it would be recognized or not.

That's why I would say that October 5th was just another day of work and great tension, and I would say that day ended with a certain degree of hope but wrapped in great uncertainty. And the real celebration was on the 6th when it was already acknowledged, and we marched down La Alameda. Anyway.