

THING OF BEAUTY | RICHARD LORD

The autobiography of Thomas J. Watson Jr, *Father, Son & Co: My Life at IBM and Beyond* (1990), tells the story of how the author's father, Thomas J. Watson Sr, built IBM into an industrial manufacturer, and how father and son together transformed it into the world's biggest computer company. Watson's account of working with his father, learning from him and sometimes clashing with him, the book focuses on how the pair created a unique culture with a focus on customer service and corporate pride. Max Liu, co-founder and chief executive of start-up EMQ, which provides individuals and companies with low-cost cross-border settlement and remittance services, explains how it changed his life.

I read the book in the ninth grade, when I was about 15. My father has always given his old newspapers, magazines and books to me. This is a thick book and I was a bit daunted by its length, but my father said, "I think you should read this." I asked what it was about and he said, "You tell me." I understood about 5 per cent of it but I read it because my dad wanted me to be more worldly.

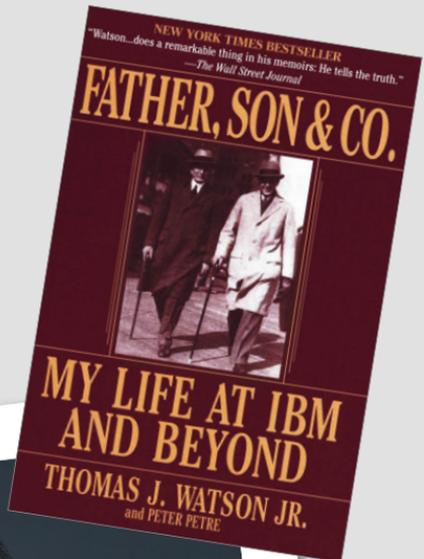
What resonated was the part where Thomas Watson Sr gives his son some advice: always leave the bathroom the way you find it. Most people don't care about bathrooms – they just use them and make them dirty. This struck a chord with me because it made me realise that people should always be accountable, even when they aren't being watched. It sounds very cliched, but integrity and attitude are very important.

I was born in Taiwan. My family moved to Hawaii before I was one as my parents wanted me to have a United States education. It was rough as we didn't have a lot of money, and my parents didn't speak much English. But my father read a lot. I remember that he'd come home and unfold old newspapers and magazines, and read them with a dictionary open next to him.

He worked for an airline. I watched him scrap his way to the top. He wasn't born into a wealthy family, he just worked really hard. A lot of this rubbed off on me. If you want to succeed in business, you have to know about people, because people are behind businesses, and you can't take short cuts.

These are some of the lessons I learned from my father. He's my hero. I've lost count of how many books he's given me. To this day he gives me things to read, particularly books about building corporate culture. He's still schooling me.

I still have *Father, Son & Co: My Life at IBM and Beyond*. It's in storage, but the crease at that page about bathrooms is still there.



Max Liu