Years ago, in his office at the University of Genoa in Italy, Vincenzo said I would have to accomplish the task of writing on him some day, as due by any good fellow to his master professor. He was dramatically right in his prediction. Here I am — making an effort to perform what I consider an impossible mission — namely, summarize my sentiments as well as the scientific community’s debt to Vincenzo Tagliasco. Given his many-faceted rare personality, well known by his colleagues throughout the world, I can only express a few emotions and perceptions while writing about my direct experiences with him from a human and scientific point of view, not necessarily in the correct temporal sequence. This write-up is intended to summarize, as succinctly and eloquently as possibly, my feelings and my profound esteem for Vincenzo Tagliasco. Here, I mention him simply by his first name and surname. After death, it is no longer necessary to identify a person by his academic or official title, such as Doctor or Professor. Death, one may say, is an event in life that equates all human beings in the face of what may be considered a mystery by itself and a mystery beyond.

As far as I can remember I first met Vincenzo when I was a student at the Engineering School of the University of Genoa in 1972. What impressed me at the very start was his enthusiastic approach to life, particularly with regard to initiating and establishing relationships with young students. He would encourage them to embark on the most ambitious task for a human being, namely to utilize their “fresh” brains to tackle the problem of extending some frontiers of the existing fund of knowledge — not merely as a curiosity-driven process but as something capable of yielding “value” in any possible form, such as a contribution of a social, economic, or political nature.

Since then, as testified by his own will to become a professor of bioengineering, a then non-existing discipline in Italy, he used his enthusiasm to convince people that the new knowledge acquired by research would achieve its culmination only if employed to generate “value”.

The second thing that impressed me was his immense trust in his co-workers. He would mention several researchers at the most prestigious international meetings in order to promote their names while assigning himself a secondary position. The incredible result was that many of his national and international colleagues were mentioned in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) tables dealing with research, development and innovation.

The third outstanding feature was his “maniacal” professionalism, as manifested by the painstaking
attention he gave to the infinitesimal details of his work: experimental data, statistics, citations, a text, the use of a word, the placing of a comma in the text of a scientific paper or an official document for research-policy makers. He was a true professional in the field of research. He left nothing to chance and yet he looked like an actor spontaneously performing a scene. We all knew that such effects were endorsed by a lot of careful and intentional effort.

The fourth striking aspect of Vincenzo’s personality and work was his ability to integrate creativity and actual achievements. This included his predictive visions for science and technology. He loved to be called an engineer — a person with the ability to construct a functioning device or system by using his “ingeniousness”. He was not excessively concerned with whether one exactly understood why a given system was working: the value of a product lays in its usability. In his view of life, function took precedence over structure.

I could say a lot more about Vincenzo. However, I think the best way to honour him would be to call him a constructor of science as well as technology. In fact, he constructed — or moulded — the lives of many who had the good fortune to know him and work with him. The word “constructor” is derived from the Latin words “cum” + “sto” + “ruo”, i.e. “to make stones roll in order to build something that stands up”: a very apt description of Vincenzo because he was one of those few individuals who could make others “stand up” after they had “rolled their minds together” with his.

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Vincenzo Tagliasco was born on 26 February 1941 at Savona in Italy. He is an Italian. He expired on 9 May 2008 at Chiavari in Italy. He received his MSc in Electronic Engineering, School of Engineering, University of Genova, Italy in 1965. He was a Full Professor of Bioengineering, University of Genoa, Italy from 1981 to 2008. He was a Professor in ‘Visual Perception and Communication’ at University of Turin during 1998—2000. He was a Visiting Scientist at the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, MIT in 1991. He was a Visiting Scientist at MIT, Department of Psychology during 1975—1980. He was an Italian delegate in the OECD Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy. He was a Research Associate at MIT, Department of Psychology, USA in 1971. He was an Associate Professor of Bioengineering, University of Genoa during 1970—1981. He was a Research Fellow at Harvard University, Boston, USA during 1969—1970. He was a Researcher of Electrical Engineering, University of Genoa during 1965—1970. He was an Expert in the selection of projects in the EU program ‘Digital Sites’ (4th Framework Programme) in 1997. He was an Expert in the EU 2nd year monitoring of Health Care Sector (4th Framework Programme) in 1997. He was a Member in a panel for EU 5-year assessment of Telematics Applications Programme in 1996. He was a Member of EU Crest sub-committee for evaluation in 1995. He was a Member of the Committee for the International Programs at the Italian Ministry of Scientific and Technological Research during 1987—1996.