

## **Roger Cochetti (7/17/23)**

I joined COMSAT in 1981, after having been a political appointee in the State Department and left in 1995, moving on to IBM. During my first decade with the company, I was in the Corporate staff as Director of Investor & Public Relations. It gave me an important perch from which to view -and often participate in- a dramatic transitional period for one of America's most important technology companies. The COMSAT that entered the decade of the 80's was quite a bit different than the one that entered the 1990's, for many reasons, three of which I will briefly describe (although any one of them could be the subject of volumes.)

Underlying and driving these COMSAT changes were important political, technological, demographic, and economic trends that I will only note: The Reagan era of American politics brought on a strong push for telecommunications deregulation (Although as a Carter alumnus, I must note that trucking, airline, railroad and other important deregulatory trends began before Reganism) and by the mid-80's, it was clear that it would include satellite communications. Many of the scientists, attorneys, accountants and other COMSAT executives who had joined the company in the 1970's at the peak of their careers were planning for their retirements. At the beginning of the 80's, satellite technology was still considered largely military/scientific although by the end, it was considered substantially commercial. Although the 1990's made "high tech" a household term, the foundation for entrepreneurial technology-driven business was laid in the 1980's, when hundreds of engineers, lawyers and multinational corporate executives struck out on their own to try their hands at a startup business promoting the notion of innovation to get rich.

These and other societal changes came together at COMAT in three ways

- 1) A major turnover in corporate leadership with a calculated effort by the Board and top leadership to recruit "new blood", mostly with non-regulated business experience (this might have included me?)
- 2) An effort to experiment with new, non-regulated but related satellite businesses so that by the time full regulation had come to COMSAT's core, regulated businesses, the company would be so diversified that it would not be dependent on its historic, core business. The variety and ingenuity of these diversification efforts was nothing less than breathtaking, although some were probably before their time.
- 3) A wholesale restructuring of COMSAT's financial condition, partly to raise funds to finance the diversification effort. COMSAT went from being a regulated, dividend-driven, low-risk, utility stock that had no debt and did not need to raise money to a company often issuing bonds and stock with a range of new, unregulated, often-risky, satellite ventures on its books.

Throughout all of this, COMSAT continued to make history and remained one of the world's most admired technology companies well into the late 80's.