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Age and Creativity

Now that the public has at last become interested in science and, incidentally, in scientists, the problem of getting the most out of the latter is occupying much time and attention. Books are being written on "creativity," and, of course, the ubiquitous symposia are being held. Through all these words it is hard to discern any clear patterns. So hard has it become that we have turned to looking around among our friends to see what happens to creativity with the passage of time.

It seems to come quite simply to this: A young scientist's mind is not filled with many facts or responsibilities. He is ignorant enough to undertake the unreasonable and the unlikely and yet come up with a solution, sometimes with a significant discovery that overthrows entrenched ideas.

Once he has made an original discovery he finds it increasingly difficult to make another. He may be busy working out the details of the first, writing about it, or supplying samples of the material and know-how to others. Before he knows it he is overwhelmed by those who rush in to take advantage of the newly created opportunities. He may get lost in the jockeying for position that results.

If he does not quickly carry his discovery further, preferably to the "molecular level," he may well be accused either of resting on his oars or of having lost interest. There are plenty who will take up where they think he has left off.

The significance of all this is that, once he has been creative, the young scientist finds it very difficult to become creative again. Committees, review articles, symposia, and society meetings consume him. He has no time or spirit left for creativity. He loses his willingness to strike out into the wilderness. He begins to follow the safe and well-worn paths. He does not know that he has but a few years to go after the big discoveries, and that, with age, so many things will crowd out his chance to try again.

To discover the really new requires not only an attitude of mind but the ability to keep the roads to the solution of problems clear and, finally, to drive full speed down them. The timorous, insulated mind will not make the grade. Roads will be blocked by too much equipment, too much money, and too much seeking after status and security. The power to drive down the roads must be self-generated—a restless urge satisfied only by movement culminating in achievement. The price is high, the material rewards are minor, and the satisfactions must come chiefly from within. If you willingly pay this price, you have a ticket of admission to the ranks of the creative. However, the society of man is a great leveler; not to be leveled requires singular force of character. From such stuff creativity arises. To keep it alive in the face of the social forces that accompany maturity requires even greater strength. It is more than worth a try.—IRVINE H. PAGE, *Research Division, Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio*