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Job Application

POSITION WANTED: My name is “Little Science,” and I have labored tirelessly and productively in the vineyards of the progress of mankind.

In previous eras I was supported by kings, queens, and wealthy benefactors, but more recently I have worked largely for governments and have always brought my employer enormous benefits, although frequently these benefits do not materialize in the same fiscal year as my labors. In the past, my discoveries, of which examples are Hertzian waves, theories of light, x-ray crystallography, carbon chemistry, recombinant DNA, genetic selection, and transistors have led to such useful products as radios, television, new materials, new pharmaceuticals, hybrid corn, and computers.

In recent years I have been kept on a starvation diet, which has been enough to sustain my existence but has prevented growth in a number of directions that could be of great advantage to me and my employer. Cells in my body, ready to produce superconductivity, new drugs, new polymers, new material devices on the nanoscale, and many other cells that could result in new discoveries, are barely surviving and are in danger of atrophy. Being humble, I have always simply lived on my subsistence salary, but recent reports in the newspapers indicate that my current employer (largely government in this era) is in serious financial difficulties and desperately in need of the kind of new products that I am particularly trained to provide.

It is my belief that, given the proper nutrient environment, I could grow into exactly the type of employee that would solve many of my employer's depressing and recessing growth problems, as described in the current press. For maximum effectiveness, it would seem best to provide added sustenance to one of my siblings, “Engineering,” who has throughout history accompanied me in my various jobs and converted my wilder ideas into practical products. My big brother, “Big Science,” is also useful for quick fixes if one needs to employ a lot of people instantly, but has less of a track record in producing the kind of innovative new products that have changed my employer's standards of living irreversibly. My products are selectively profitable to my immediate employer initially, but almost always result eventually in an improved standard of living for everyone in the world. Then my employer sees that everyone else is living as well as he is, and he wants a new burst of creativity from me. That, of course, means that the potential for employment of someone like me never ceases, but I am actually having a number of children, and will be able to supply the demand of any employer for any number of employees for a long time to come, provided that I have enough food to reproduce and enough money to educate my children.

I should warn a prospective employer that I have peculiar work habits. I like to choose my own projects and, although I am invariably productive, it is not always predictable whether the particular project will produce the expected product. Thus, when I was studying electron discharges I unexpectedly discovered x-rays, and when I wanted to understand the viral cure for cancer I came up with a vaccine for polio. As mentioned above, my projects rarely produce a product in the same fiscal year in which they are started, but when they come to fruition, there's usually a big payoff.

It may be difficult for some to understand why my income should be increased when there are so many other indigent people who are living even less well than I am. But the history of this kind of recession is that arguing over a diminishing pie only increases rancor between the competing groups and provides no increase in the average living wage for all workers. Thus, painful as it may be to select some individuals for preferred treatment, the alternative to a genteel (or when push comes to shove—not so genteel) decline for all workers is to give me the kind of chance to which I have always responded well in the past. It will of course be my responsibility to indicate those projects that are most likely to be beneficial but, as I said, my ability to predict specific innovations has not always been successful.

I am, of course, somewhat amused by my name Little Science because I have grown so big and so important to my employer. Perhaps it is because I am so modest and unobtrusive that my glamorous cousins in savings and loans and waste management get most of the headlines, but maybe a crisis is just what is needed to reevaluate my importance to my patrons.—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.