



### Life is a Journey, but Travel the Right Way

My motorcycle trip across Europe in June was fantastic. I landed in Frankfurt, rented a BMW1200RT, and hit the road. In a big circle, I went through Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, and back into Germany. There were two highlights I will always remember. One is driving at 200 km/hr on the Autobahn. It only lasted for about 30 seconds, but it was exhilarating. The second was crossing a very high bridge in Switzerland between two mountains where a cross-wind hit me hard enough to throw me into the other lane on the bridge and almost over the very low railing. This was also very exhilarating. As soon as I was able to finally get across the bridge, I had to stop and catch my breath and let my heart rate come down to a reasonable level. The trip was a great journey.

Our careers are also journeys. There are some pointers that can help you along the way that are not quantified, but any successful senior scientist/engineer will agree are worthwhile in an anecdotal way. Some of these pointers I have covered previously; last month, for instance, I recommended paying attention to your publication and funding records. In January, I wrote about Jimmy Valvano's suggestion that each day you must laugh, cry, think, and hug your family. Here are a few more rules of the road that I have learned (in some cases, hard lessons):

Research should be fun if you are doing it right.

A BS degree means facing hard problems, an MS degree means facing harder problems, and a PhD degree means taking extremely hard problems and simplifying them into fundamental questions.

When you present a paper or brief someone, be excited about your work. . . .don't waste others time by being boring.

There is no substitute for good writing and great presentations. Try not to write junk.

Always remember the significance and originality requirements for research and publications.

Do not be discouraged by publication rejection. We have all had our share, so get back on the horse.

Academics sometimes think that 90% of all the worthwhile problems are solved and there are only 10% worthwhile problems left. Industrial scientists sometimes think only 10% of worthwhile problems are solved and 90% are left. Collaborations with people not like yourself are sometimes the most worthwhile.

Manage your time carefully. Steven Covey in "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" teaches you to work the

urgent/ important issues first. Second, work the nonurgent/ important issues before you work the urgent/nonimportant issues. You should never work nonurgent/nonimportant issues. Use a calendar to implement this approach.

Go after the career you want. Do not be modest or let it remain a mystery to the people who can help you.

Take care of your friends and colleagues. This is the right thing to do and will pay off many times over.

Do not spend time on negative issues if you do not have to. Do not dwell on negative events: move onto the positive.

Do not allow any form of discrimination (like racism) or any other poisonous attitude to enter your life.

Be humble, simple, and treat others the way you want to be treated. There are few exceptions to this rule.

In some cases, I learned the above rules of the road for the career journey through experience, and in some cases I learned them from others who were mentors. In general, these work very well, but are not all-inclusive.

On my motorcycle trip, I followed some great advice to make the journey much better. One is that I used three small bags packed inside a large suitcase for the flight to Europe. Once I landed and rented the bike, I pulled the three small bags out and they fit right into the motorcycle saddlebags. That was the best lesson on the trip. Another lesson, provided by my friend, Joe Mait, was that Americans think that 100 years is old, whereas Europeans think 100 miles is far. My trip validated both perspectives.

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