

Minds Against Progress



Send him mail.



“Insight for the Young and Unrestrained” is an original column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found here. IYU-only RSS feed available here.

It’s important to always defend ourselves and those we love from potentially dangerous foreign concepts and people. But it’s also crucial for our own growth and the betterment of those around us that we never lose hope in the goodness contained in people, ideas, and practices outside our current understanding. The loss of this hope is what eventually leads to the withering of anything which can be referred to as a human spirit.

We must guard ourselves carefully against listening to that little voice which is, by default, frightful of circumstances it does not understand, or new experiences contrary to previous experience. It is implicitly believed that if our previous experience is always a reliable indicator for future events that we see ourselves as having already experienced everything reality has to offer.

This is arrogance in the highest regard. There will always be infinitely greater things that could happen in the future than *have* happened in the past. Perhaps, for this reason, it is people with the greatest amount of future remaining ahead of them and eagerness to explore this future that should be given credence and authority in a world of constantly shifting conditions.

The Immeasurable Value of Social Entrepreneurs

This is why we all owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the innovators and entrepreneurs of the past and present. An entrepreneur is anyone who innovates a new way of doing things, or who builds bridges and structures for new cultural habits to emerge. This can mean improving upon an old system, constructing a new one entirely, or something in between.

Though the term is usually applied to the world of business, it’s just as appropriate elsewhere. A lifestyle entrepreneur, for example, is someone who succeeds in creating a

lifestyle totally different than the people around him, or what he had been exposed to previously. A parenting entrepreneur is someone who figures out a progressive new way to interact with their children, in spite of local conventional behavior. An educational entrepreneur changes the way he teaches to fit the results he receives, ignoring standard methodology and curriculum.

These literal and figurative bridge builders are almost always met with the greatest of resistance when initially attempting to redirect the flow of humanity's river. We have to learn to recognize the value of their different takes on life, even when they show up in unconventional and seemingly weird ways. Everything that is common practice now was once weird in its inception. Everything that is safe and established was once dangerous and new. There are no exceptions to progress.

Overcoming Fear of the Unusual

So the next time a stranger, a friend, a child, or a famous person tries a totally new approach to an old situation, be honest with yourself before you judge. Is what they are doing really objectively insane or irrational? Or is that just your mind's automated sense of disruption that arises when you look at the world a little differently? And if it is, are you holding back what could be a major amount of potential progress for both the individuals carrying it out and the rest of us who might one day be influenced to take similar action? One of the worst things you can do is become an obstacle in the path of humanity's forerunners.

Is your fear of new and unusual approaches based on your own previous and subjective experience? Is it only a comparison to the general paradigm of the people around you? Even worse, have you fallen into the great intellectual trap of thinking that because you have lived a certain number of years that you are qualified to judge the actions of others in fields totally unrelated to whatever expertise you may have gathered in this time? To be able to honestly answer this question, you'll have to humble yourself down a few pegs on the totem pole of self-inflation.

The Destruction of Young People

Young adults and teenagers are always the biggest object of attack from the anti-progress mentality. Children get off easy with the acknowledgment of their natural naiveté and inexperience in "the real world." The same courtesy is often not extended once they reach an age where they are capable of actually acting upon their unconventional ambitions and ideas.

As inherently foolhardy many of them may be, it is the discouragement of these strange passions in youth by embittered older people that ultimately kills originality for life. Human society suffers as a whole without the valuable input of these creative thinkers and

anomalous actors. The adults who so abrasively dissuade them think they might be doing them a favor, and though saving them from some painful falls and failures they may be, the overall impact is a strengthening of established practice and the death of new things.

Think About It...

It is our nature to want to help and grant advice where it is needed. But if we don't fully understand where the limits of the advice we have to offer lie, we achieve the exact opposite of what is intended by offering our overly helpful hands. And ultimately, if a person can learn the balance of exactly how much to give and when to recede, he will earn far more respect from those who may have something valuable to learn from him. He can still contribute what his experience has granted him to those who lack it, without also building artificial barriers to whatever else might be achieved by those with differing ambitions.

Don't be the overbearing asshole who insists on instilling his worldview onto anyone less enlightened who has the misfortune of falling into your aim. Be the man worth coming to, and the man whose contributed value speaks for itself. It is only when your positive reputation fails to precede you that you have to try to force fit your words and ideas where they were never welcome to begin with. If what you have to offer is worth anything at all, you shouldn't have to work so hard to find an accepting audience anyway.