

Want to Be a Scholar? Be a Scholar; You Don't Need Academia's Approval

A popular Twitter account I follow recently asked his audience where the best grad school would be for someone to go if they wanted to become a scholar in the tradition of Nobel Prize-winning economist F.A. Hayek (whose brilliant ideas are very little appreciated in academia).

The answers were all the same. Try this school, or maybe that one, study with this professor, or maybe this one. All were pretty tepid. The final conclusion of the thread seemed to be, "Well, I guess the best thing is to tell a young student interested in Hayek to pretend they're not, get into the highest ranked program possible, keep their head down for a decade until they get tenure, then start talking about Hayek."

That's a pretty sad and risky strategy. Sad because it means pretending to be something you're not for a decade or so just to win paper prestige from corrupt institutions. Risky because someone who pretends to be something well enough to fool those around them for that long is likely to fool themselves as well. It's likely they'll come out the other side as the thing they were pretending to be.

It Doesn't Have to Be Like This

The thing that really struck me about this thread was the complete and utter lack of imagination. Actually, scratch that. It doesn't even take imagination because the alternative exists and some people are doing it. It's more like a complete lack of awareness of the world that already exists. Like the academic who proclaimed that the private maintenance of maritime lighthouses was impossible, while the lighthouse out his own window was at that very time privately maintained.

The possibilities are endless.

Imagine you're deeply interested in the ideas of Hayek (or any other thinker) and you want to become expert in them, understand their implications, and advance them to new frontiers. You don't have to please anyone or get anyone's permission to do this!

Create a blog, YouTube Channel, self-published book, podcast, Quora account, or all of the above. Read every book and article available and publicly share your learning process. Launch an "Exploring Hayek" podcast, and use it as an excuse to invite every single Hayek scholar to a conversation. They will say yes. No one ever asks them on podcasts or has deep interest in their work!

Publish your notes from each episode. Turn them into an open research paper, where you

think out loud and invite your audience into the process. If you do it well, and consistently, you will attract some of the best minds on the topic and get free “thesis advisors.” This is just a few thoughts at the top of the mind. The possibilities are endless.

Create Your Own Way

When you stop thinking about how to do X new thing within the old stodgy game Y and instead ask how to do X, period, with or without playing the game Y, the world opens up.

If you want to be the best at something, build the best system to get there.

It’s the same for every passion and profession. You think medical school is the only way to save lives or improve health? It might be one of the least effective ways, for all you know. Great athletes create new training regimens. Great artists create new techniques. Greatness creates its own definitions.

Separate your goals and desires from the well-worn tracks others use to move towards them. Big leaps of personal and social progress occur from chasing ends, not conforming to means. If you want to be the best at something, build the best system to get there.