

The Importance of People

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Laboratory Interlude

This month *The Importance of People* is privileged to present that eminent savant, pedant, and historical scholar, J. Abner Peddiwell, Ph.D., of Petaluma State College. J. Abner Peddiwell, as will be recalled by all who are out of their educational swaddling clothes, is the author of the immortal Saber-Tooth Curriculum. In his pleasant, chatty letter accompanying "Laboratory Interlude," Doctor Peddiwell sends greetings from Dean Harold Benjamin of the University of Maryland, with whom Peddiwell apparently still maintains a close relationship.

We must warn you that J. Abner Peddiwell is in a sober mood today, unfortified by that loveliest flower of the plains, the Tequila Daisy. In this age of anxiety haunted by the alphabet bombs, fortifications grow harder to find. Perhaps only ideas are the enduring fortifications . . . but enough of unscientific speculation. Guided by Peddiwell, let us look into the great laboratory during a "Laboratory Interlude."

William Van Til

THE LABORATORY DIRECTOR noticed a test tube slightly out of place in its rack on one of the top shelves. He reached up to adjust it, paused a moment, then took it down and glanced at its contents with faintly awakening curiosity.

"Who's working on this?" he asked carelessly.

"On what?" inquired the Chief Assistant, thinking, *I wish he would keep his all-knowing paws off my stuff.*

"On Delta Yoke 9-47836," said the Director, peering at the label.

"Why, I am," replied the Assistant. "What about it?" This time the edge in his voice was unmistakable. He was thinking, *no privacy here, no freedom, and the place is supposed to be devoted to both.*

"Any objections to my looking at one of these cultures occasionally?" asked the Director. "You can look at any of them any time you want to, Buddy. I guess I can, too, or can't I?"

"Sure, sure," muttered the Assistant, bending over the notes on his desk.

The Director Questions

The Director carried the test tube to his work table, set it in a rack, inserted a needle in its contents, put a droplet on a slide, adjusted a cover glass, and placed the slide under his incomparable microscope. Then he sat for a long time looking into the instrument.



The Assistant watched the Director covertly. He noted his hands on the

multiple magnification knobs. He saw him touch the controls that gave the effect of backing the slide away from the observer at many times the speed of light. And he thought bitterly, *anybody else would miss it. But not him! In the end, he's got to know everything!*

At last the Director raised his head and stared at the Assistant. The younger scientist returned the stare coldly. *No use to try to hide it, he thought. I might as well meet him on my feet with my chin up.*

"What have you done to 'em?" the Director asked with a softness of tone that would have been deceptive to a stranger.

"You tell me," sneered the Assistant, his white face contradicting the temerity of his words. "You know everything."

With no outward show of emotion the great scientist lowered his head to gaze into the microscope again. This time he looked so long that the Assistant found himself wanting to scream. *Have it over with! You know now. You probably knew before you started.*

Finally the Director turned from the microscope. "What was it?" he demanded crisply.

"You know what it was. You saw the pattern. You must have—" The Assistant's voice died at his chief's face. "All right. I'll answer," he began again.

"I can see these organisms moving from the first stage of being mere users of their environment as they found it," said the Director. "I can see them beginning to cultivate other organisms, beginning to get food and other needs from this systematic improvement of their biological environment. They cease to be food gatherers. They become farmers and herdsmen. The social growth factor seems to operate perfectly. They get into this second stage

without too much trouble. You didn't jam them up at that point?"

"Not much, Chief," said the Assistant humbly.

"But when they go into the third stage, when they start utilizing the power from sunlight, fossil fuels, and rearranging the composition of their materials," pursued the Director, "they go hay-wire. Why did you do it, Buddy?"

"I just wanted to experiment—do something different, Chief. After all, I'm a scientist."

"Scientist!" The Director spat out the word. "These tiny organisms have got rights! What do you think our laboratory is for? You've ruined this culture." He picked up the test tube and started for the sink.

"Hey!" cried the Assistant. "What are you going to do with that?"

"Throw it down the drain, of course."

"But wait! Give those organisms a chance."

"Chance," repeated the Director bitterly. "You've fixed their chances." He started slowly to invert the test tube.

Behavior Change or Self-Destruction

"Hold it! Don't throw that culture away, Chief. Listen just a minute."

"All right," said the Director. "I'm listening."

"You saw what happened when some of those organisms tried to move into the third stage?"

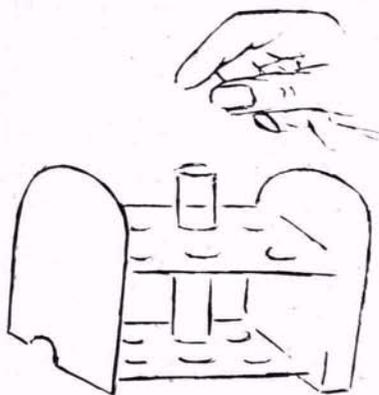
The Director nodded coldly. "Sure. Their behavior-changing factor didn't keep up with their utilization of power. What did you do to them?"

"I—er—I stepped up their self-destructive factor—just a little."

"Just a little! It was enough to upset the balance we have established in all these other studies. And now that some of these organisms are ready to move

into the fourth stage of control of their own capacities and energies, they are blocked. You have got them to the place where they are going to destroy themselves, blow up the whole test tube! I won't have my laboratory messed up even in a tiny spot." His hand moved the test tube over the sink again.

"Listen, Chief. Give 'em a break. They have developed a lot of behavior changing to move them into the fourth stage. They have got all the control of power instruments they need. They know now how to work it all out on that third stage. The stepped-up factor of self-destruction has formed its antibodies on the behavior-changing side. They can move into the fourth stage. I'm sure they can!"



"Well, I'm not so sure," said the Director, "but I'll give them a little more time."

He put the test tube back on the shelf.

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