Physics World, April 1994 p25

Why so miserable?

What a gloomy lot we physicists are allowing ourselves to become. *Physics World* is becoming gloomier with each succeeding issue. It is time we started taking stock of ourselves and broke out of this self-destructive gloom-doom syndrome. Let's stop this endless moaning and get on with enjoying life. Let's not feel that we must all the time use hackneyed expressions such as "spin-offs" but instead start to appreciate our subject for its inherent beauty and as a vital part of our culture. Of course we would like more students, higher salaries, better funding, and so on. But that may not be realistic.

We should not expect ever-increasing numbers of students to come flocking to us. Physics does not have a monopoly on interesting careers. The young person these days has a wide range of stimulating opportunities, unrivalled by any previous period in our history.

The funding of science is higher now than it has ever been. Society has been willing to fund very large projects - comparable to the construction of the great cathedrals - because, I believe, society is interested in the ideas of physics and other subjects.

Too often our lectures are dull, unimaginative and humourless. Our interests are often excessively narrow and we fail to transmit to students the breadth, unity and excitement of our subject. We are our own worst enemies.

Physics is not an easy subject. The deep concepts are not learnt overnight, yet we expect students to see immediately concepts that have often taken centuries to develop and that we have personally perhaps taken 20 years to absorb. Physics is demanding and we do it a disservice to portray it otherwise. We expect Olympic athletes to make sacrifices, to undertake rigorous training and to endure the course, and we must expect the same of our students. Not all will succeed. Many students are looking for challenges and stimulation and my experience is that they will respond positively if we are positive.

Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, like other similar books, has attracted unprecedented interest. I believe public interest has never been so great. Travelling on the Trans-Siberian railway from Beijing to Moscow, I was bombarded by young and old alike with deep questions on physics and cosmology. There is a hunger for knowledge out there, but we choose to moan.

Of course physics is relevant to the entire gamut of modern technology and without it we would be living in a much depressed and less stimulating environment. We have many past achievements to be proud of and some to be ashamed of. Let's try to be more positive, cheerful and good-humoured. We have an exciting subject. Let's convey that excitement.

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