



CONTRIBUTIONS

Letters

Pragmatic Advice Revisited

Dear Editor:

I wish to clarify the intended meaning in my commentary "Some Pragmatic Advice to Graduate Students: a Hybridization of Stearns, Huey, and Binkley" (Witz 1994, *ESA Bulletin* 75:176-177). In a recent issue of your publication, McKay and Ridley (1995, *ESA Bulletin* 76:53) unfortunately have misinterpreted the statements in the section of my commentary entitled "On Psychological Problems." First, I wish to commend Ms. McKay and Ms. Ridley for having the courage to attend a support group to help resolve their difficulties. They obviously have faced their problems and dealt with them effectively. I believe the main thrust of their criticism is in my use of the phrase "psychological problems." The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines psychology as the "mental and behavioral aspect of an individual." Although McKay and Ridley imply that the term "psychological" has some pejorative meaning, I must disagree. However, I will use their term "emotional problems" in place of "psychological problems" if they feel less offended by this phrase.

I never advocated that one should "avoid advancing yourself in a career just because of an emotional shake up." I am, quite frankly, surprised that Ms. McKay and Ms. Ridley misread between the lines and gleaned this alleged implication. In fact, I feel exactly as they do. I quite agree with them that "everyone has conflicts with the people in our lives." After all, we are human. I too have had my share of emotional setbacks. The problem I tried to address in my commentary, which Ms. Ridley and Ms. McKay obviously missed, was that one must *resolve* these conflicts to be a successful graduate student. I too often have witnessed graduate students forced to abandon, postpone, or unnecessarily prolong their careers because of "emotional problems" that they were unable to resolve while in graduate school. Please be certain that I do not wish to discourage anyone from attaining their academic goals because of some peripheral conflict. My point is that the emotional demand of a graduate career is, in and of itself, quite stressful. Any problems peripheral to the stress inherent in the business of being a graduate student can only exacerbate the problem of completing this challenging task.

In fact, many of us, including myself, resolve such conflicts and manage to complete our education successfully. However, denying that such "emotional problems" can and do have a negative impact on one's career is, in my view, potentially more damaging than the problem itself. My intent is now, and was at the time I wrote the original article, to call attention to the fact that psychological/emotional stability is beneficial to the successful completion of a graduate career. I meant nothing more and nothing less than that. The ability to recognize one's problems *and* cope with them can only increase one's success in any walk of life. I'm glad that Ms. McKay and Ms. Ridley have dealt with their problems; many of us do. I hope they also recognize the fact that, unfortunately, not everyone does.

Brian W. Witz
Department of Biological Sciences
Southern Arkansas University
Magnolia, AR 71753