

The World of Albert: There are days you would like to forget about

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Monday, 25 February 2008

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A few months ago I went to a conference. At this conference I presented a poster with which I introduced my research project and with which I also showed first promising and interesting results. During a discussion with another researcher I was suggested to use some refinements of my experiments which might turn out to be useful and which might complement the understanding of the processes under investigation. I thought about it the following days and got an idea what to do. However, I also realized that for doing it I needed to buy some additional equipment. This again meant that I had to talk to my research group leader whether funding is available. Being back in my lab I discussed the project with my mentor and asked him whether we might be able to acquire the necessary parts. He was very open towards this new approach and therefore agreed willingly to provide the money required. The following days I was spending most of the time in my office, searching for the equipment, asking for prize offers and finally ordering the necessary parts. This then of course meant that I had to wait for some time which allowed me to finally continue my old experiments which were still on a premature level. I was occupied with these for the coming weeks and I progressed fairly well and could be satisfied with the results obtained. Still, however, I felt some uneasiness inside of me. I realized more and more that the investigations as they had been suggested to me were really needed to reach a full understanding of my recent results. I became impatient and it felt always like Christmas when one package after the other was arriving with the parts I had ordered. Still, the major part still needed at least another two weeks and so my mood and my motivation were decreasing from day to day. I wanted to get started especially since I already knew that I will run into other problems. Finally, the last order arrived and I could get started. I was happy and excited the following morning because I knew that I could begin assembling my new experiment. I also got the idea that it might be possible to combine the experiments I wanted to do and the ones which I have been performing the last weeks. Still, I was aware that I needed to make one step after the other and that it was impossible to make large jumps from the beginning. However, I told to myself that I had to keep things in mind. All day long I ordered my equipment, connected the different devices and the small parts as required. The hole process also made wandering around a lot to find cables, screws and so on in the lab or in the electronic and mechanical work shops. It progressed well, but still I could not finish the initial setup. It took me another four days to assemble everything as I had thought about it. Another week which I did not spend doing the experiments I wished to perform so hardly. After my mood had been better at the start of my work on the construction of my experiment it decreased again from day to day. I wanted to do the experiments. I wanted to see results. I had to wait and I knew it. The weekend in between I could not work on the setup since on Friday I realized that I needed a few special connectors which we did not have in the lab ourselves, but in the electrical workshop, that, however, had already been closed at the time I realized my need. A weekend full of dissatisfaction and uneasiness. The Monday after I arrived in the lab and one of the first stops was at the workshop to pick up the missing parts. I immediately received it and got back to my setup. I attached the connectors and turned on my devices. It worked, but not in the way it was supposed to work or as I wanted it to work. I was desperate. "What's going on?" was what I was thinking in this moment. I looked through everything and did not find a deviation from my little plans. I started to think and to think, but nothing. My desperation became stronger and stronger and so I decided to take a coffee. My brain needed to cool down. Luckily I met one of the technicians who was just eating a sandwich at the bar. I was joining him and I told him about my problems. He looked at me in an astonished and puzzled way. He just told me that of course it could not work like this. After he had finished his sandwich and I had drunken my coffee we went to the lab and I showed him my setup. He looked at it took out some connections reconnected them at slightly different places and my test experiment started to work. The devices and controls were harmonizing nicely. He started to explain me my mistake and I told to myself how stupid I was. It is always like this. You think about the whole, you are with your experiment already further than you actually are and in the end you make a stupid little mistake. A mistake that obvious that you actually cannot believe it that you have done it. That is the way it is I guess. Still, it is frustrating. You have to take care of each detail, but sometimes not being patient enough leads you to all this stupid errors. However, these are also the moments you learn a lot. As one of my professors has once told me: "You learn more making one mistake than making everything right." Even it is not the hole truth partially it is.

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