

krauses' korner

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Improvement Starts with Change



By Albert Einstein (Special Guest Author)

Hello and greetings to you all. My name is Albert Einstein, and I am your guest columnist this month. Yes, that Albert Einstein. The theory of relativity guy. The $E=mc^2$ guy. The guy who suggested to President Roosevelt that it would be advisable to build an atomic bomb. (Sorry about that one!)

Now, I'm sure you're wondering what a famous physicist like me is doing writing an article for Softball Magazine. Well, when I was alive my job was pondering the mysteries of the universe. But since I'm dead now and part of the cosmic consciousness (so to speak), all those so-called "mysteries" are kind of out in the open. (Read all the way to the end, by the way, and I will explain the meaning of life to you.) What that means, basically, is I don't have a lot to do.

You may also question how much I, as a German-born physicist, know about fast-pitch softball. Am I really qualified to write this column? Hey, I was Time Magazine's freakin' Person of the Century. Let's see Bill Hillhouse match that!

I tried playing the harp, but when you've developed the first fluctuation dissipation theorem the harp just isn't that challenging. It's kind of cliché, too. I also tried golf – they have great courses up here, or so I'm told – but I have to say I wasn't going to win any Nobel prizes for it (if they even have those; I'm not that sure what sort of prizes they give for golf).

So there I was with nothing to do and infinite time in which to do it when I saw that Ken Krause guy was going to use a quote of mine for his article. It seemed like the stars were aligned perfectly, which is pretty appropriate when you're the founder of relativistic cosmology, so I figured I'd give him a much-needed break. (I read his last column and quite honestly it was even less funny than usual so I thought a little time off might do him some good.)

You may also question how much I, as a German-born physicist, know about fastpitch softball. Am I really qualified to write this column? Hey, I was Time Magazine's freakin' Person of the Century. Let's see Bill Hillhouse match that! My name is also synonymous with incredible intelligence. Sure there have been other smart guys along the way, but let's face it. When you hear the name Carl Sagan you think "billions and billions" but not much else. When you hear the name Stephen Hawking you think "wheelchair." You know you do. But when you hear the name Albert Einstein you think "genius." You know it, baby.

Anyway, the quote that Krause guy was going to use is my definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

(By the way, I didn't really come up with that one. My butcher Hans Fleischer did. Every week I would go into his shop to buy some wiener schnitzel and sauerkraut, and I'd say "Hans, how about a little discount for the guy who developed the EPR paradox?" After a while he got pretty annoyed, told me I was insane to think he'd give me any sort of discount, and then came up with the quote as his explanation of what he meant. I think I punched him afterwards, but it was a long time ago. But when I thought about it later I liked the quote so I've been using it ever since. Which is ok, really, because who wants to quote Hans Fleischer the butcher in any case?)

So how does all of this relate to fastpitch softball? Simple: you will never get better at this game unless you're willing to change what you're doing. Think about it.

Improvement, by definition, means some sort of change occurred. You don't have to have an IQ that's off the charts (as the kids say) or a chemical element name after you (Einsteinium, atomic weight 99, thank you very much) to figure that one out. So it follows that if you're not willing to change what you're doing, you won't improve. At best, you will remain the same. At worst, you will continue to practice or use a technique that will cause you to fail, if not today then somewhere down the road.

There are lots of reasons softball players don't want to change what they're doing. One of the biggest is they're comfortable using the skills they have. Change is difficult. Change is uncomfortable. It might even cause you a few setbacks at first. But change is necessary if you want to get better than you are now.

Take a pitcher for example. Her team needed someone in the circle, so she picked up the ball one day and started chucking it toward the plate. She didn't have any training so she just did whatever it took to get the ball there. And she can get it there pretty reliably and pretty hard compared to the other inexperienced pitchers in her league.

Then mom and dad decide to spring for pitching lessons and suddenly she's being told she needs to do a lot of things differently. She'd rather just keep doing what she's doing, because she already knows how. But eventually those mechanics will hold her back, and may even prevent her

from continuing her pitching career. So she has to decide – does she make the change now, or does she stay in her comfort zone? That decision can have a big impact on her later on.

Another reason, quite honestly, is success. When a player has success, especially early in his career, there doesn't seem to be much incentive to change what he's doing. Don't all those people who wish they were another me say "if it ain't broke don't fix it?" (You have to admit my Hans' quote is way better than that one. It's even better English, which is pretty cool since English was not my first language.)

Being privy to pretty much everything that goes on here on Earth (since the dead don't have much to do other than watch the living), I have watched as coaches try to instruct a player on the proper technique for, say, throwing, only to have the player say he doesn't need to do it that way because he can get the ball where it needs to go when he throws it his way. Never mind that it isn't nearly as hard as the player can throw, or as quick, or as accurate. The ball gets there and that's all that matters to the player.

Some players, like some physicists (and you know who you are Frits Zernike), are just stubborn. They can see the value of changing, but they don't feel like doing it, or they don't want to admit someone else knows more than they do. Others are poorly taught early in their careers and just cling to what they learned. I feel bad for them, because they sort of get brainwashed.

Whatever the reason, though, it really doesn't matter. The point is, the only way to get better is to constantly reexamine what you're doing, look hard at the explanation of why to change as well as what to change, and then if it makes sense put in the work to make the change.

Well, that's it for me. Hope you enjoyed our little "chat." I know I did. It's nice to communicate with beings that have actual bodies again. It makes it so much easier to know where to look. As for the meaning of life, it's seven. What did you expect from a physicist and mathematical genius?

Sorry I won't be able to take any questions or comments. But I will say "hi" to your Nana for you. If you do have any comments, you can direct them to that Krause guy at kkrause342@aol.com. And check out his blog at <http://fastpitchlane.softballsuccess.com>. You never know – I may just do a post for him there too.