

Professor David Audretsch: My Doktorvater



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Abstract When JP Tamvada wrote an email to David in the summer of 2004, he never expected a quick reply and invitation to come and meet him at the Max Planck Institute. In the 5 years following that first meeting, David taught the author invaluable lessons of life, exemplified ideal leadership, and shaped their scholarship.

My Doktorvater

After my first presentation at the Max Planck Institute based on preliminary thoughts on why the famous U curve of Wennerkers and Thurik might not give a full picture on entrepreneurship and economic development, David called me to his office. I was not sure what his reaction was going to be. At the meeting, I couldn't believe my ears when he spent all of time giving superlatively positive feedback, and wanted to put me in a plane to America to give the presentation at a conference in America. His irresistible optimism left me inspired.

Often, I walked with him to the Jena station to see him off while discussing things we believed were significant for science and society. Most times, he would ask me to hop into the train to continue the conversation. For me, these moments gave me an opportunity to intellectually engage with him on topics beyond my dissertation. Armed with a ticket that he'd buy for me, we used to have lively conversations until he got into a connecting train at Weimar. Sometimes, he'd hijack me into the next train while never once forgetting to give me cash to buy my return ticket to Jena. David, a distinguished professor for the world, remains a loving Doktorvater for me.

My first paper with him taught me the art of science. David's meticulous attention to detail ensured that no stone was left unturned when it came to teaching me the art of writing a scientific paper. Once I learnt this from the master craftsman, I wrote my dissertation on entrepreneurship and economic development that

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eventually received a best PhD award from DRUID in Denmark and won me the Otto Hahn Medal in Germany. Not just me, but everyone in David's entrepreneurship group brought laurels to the Max Planck Institute. If Jim Collins's bestseller "Good to Great" needed a legendary example of a level five leader, David should be its most compelling choice.

One of the many exciting things we did as a team at Max Planck Institute was go to India to organise two conferences with the Indian Institute of Science. David led from front by being there both times. For the first workshop the Max Planck Society gave us funds. For the second one, it didn't. But David did. He funded it from the Institute's budget. He could have easily closed down the project but he pushed us forward, as he always did. These conferences in Bangalore attracted some of the leading academics and policy makers from within India, Germany and the US. It laid new foundations for entrepreneurship research in developing countries.

David became a unifying force bringing some of the best entrepreneurship scholars from around the world to Max Planck while galvanising young researchers to passionately pursue a diverse range of subfields within the broad areas of entrepreneurship, innovation and public policy. His genius at spotting research opportunities, childlike excitement at new ideas, eagerness to support while trusting people blended together to create a fertile landscape for young scholars and scholarship to thrive. Entrepreneurship research at the Max Planck Institute flourished not because of his toughness but because of his love.

David-ness aspires the very best for everyone who crosses one's path. It is a way of life, and delights in leading by serving. If replicated, this incredible David-ness can transform workplaces, human relationships, and our lives. As I take this delightful walk down my memory lane, I can't help but thank him for being David.