30 January 1994

Dear John,

I'd like to respond to your question about what's not working, but not by filling out the form. This free-form letter will do it better.

On the whole, John, things are working well. Evergreen is still a great place to work and teach (should that be "work at" and "teach at"?). It is not thrilling to teach DNA-RNA-protein for the umpteenth time, but I still manage to even learn something new every time I do M_2O. But the issue, the frustration, is over TIME, and I suspect you'll find other faculty members saying the same thing. The demands on our time are overwhelming.

Here I sit, early on Sunday morning, working over my computer to prepare for the coming week. I gave myself the enormous gift of taking off Saturday morning to go birding, but I could hardly afford the time. I need to prepare 3 hours of lecture for tomorrow morning, plus a 1.5-hour workshop that I can give twice tomorrow afternoon and once on Friday. I need to pour two liters of plates for this week's lab and for the two high-school students I'm guiding through some research in our lab. I need to prepare some bacteria for the next step in the genetic cloning lab that the students are doing during these two weeks, and test the protocol to be sure things will go well. I'll run this lab three times: All Wednesday morning, all Thursday afternoon, and all Friday morning. Tuesday morning I'll spend two hours helping to interview the next Provost candidate,[1] and Tuesday noon I'll meet with the students who are helping to run the T4 lab, about getting things organized better. I have to talk to several faculty members and try to convince them to join our Governance Study Group, which will meet at noon on Wednesday. I have letters of recommendation to write, and a supporting letter for Jan Ott. I'm behind on evaluations, and somewhere in the growing pile in my Do Box is Steve Hunter's request for a faculty activity analysis, a request for information about the spring quarter of Undergraduate Research in Molecular Biology, and a reminder from the bookstore about ordering books for spring. Stuff is piling up on my desk (which is usually pretty neat) that needs sorting, filing, and action. And when I can get free of all this, my publisher and co-author are expecting some revised versions of the first eight chapters of our book. (I'm stealing the time to write this letter to relieve my frustration a bit.)

I need to get off the treadmill. I could use a secretary or aide who could do a lot of my work, but most of my work couldn't be done by anyone else, or it would take as long to explain what to do as to do it myself. Some of the lab work could be done by a more knowledgeable aide, but we don't have any. (Our Science Instructional Technicians are wonderful, smart people who do a terrific job, and most of the student aides are also very good, but they generally don't know how

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[1] Oh, thank goodness, he's dropped out! Two free hours!

to do what needs to be done for these labs.) I thank the Powers of the Universe that Jim Neitzel, who evidently has some time to keep up with the literature a bit, was able to give me some review articles about genetic regulation that I can incorporate into my lecture; otherwise I'd just be saying what's in the book. I'm not even pushing our students to go over a lot of material right now; if I tried to push faster, they'd have nervous breakdowns and so would I.

About a week ago, I gave a guest lecture about biodiversity for the MES program that John Perkins, Tom Rainey, and Lin Nelson are teaching. Part of my thesis was that we humans need the natural world for our own sanity as much as the natural world needs human sanity for its survival. In our crowded, hurrying, hustling world, there is less and less room for beauty, for grace, for wonder, for reflection, and for real leisure. My Saturday morning jaunt (up at 5:20, on the road by 6:00) took me to the home of some people near Seabeck, on the Kitsap Peninsula, who maintain their land as a nature preserve and who have Mountain Quail, which I had never seen before. For about an hour, I walked around, enjoying the stillness and the fog, sipping my coffee, watching the towhees, fox sparrows, juncos, and Steller's jays feeding; and then, when I was about ready to give up and leave, the quail came in, four of them running down the path to where the feed was scattered. They were cute and funny and very beautiful. I enjoyed watching them. For a few minutes, I re-created myself. I put number 493 on my life list--oh, to reach the 500 level!

My students and I are all on a terrible treadmill. We are all pushing it, all being pushed by the speed and craziness of our society. But real learning demands some leisure, some time for sitting and sipping coffee and brandy and reflecting. The academy ought to provide something of a bulwark against the crazy, hustling world. At least, Evergreen ought to provide that. We ought to be able to make ourselves a quiet, calm little island that can, at times, create its own fierce intellectual and creative excitement. If I could be God, that's what I would make this place. Sometimes it really is like that. But too often it is just a crazy hustle to Get Things Done. I wish the Deans and Provost and President could appoint themselves a Collective God and figure out some way to get us off the treadmill.

Best wishes,

Burt Guttman