



SI-34

### The Right Answer

*If you think there is only one right answer, you'll stop looking as soon as you find one. —Roger von Oech*

Are you living and perhaps teaching as if there is only one right answer? Even Einstein, when teaching a graduate course, was said to have used the same final exam twice. Why? He saw no reason to change the questions when the answers have changed since the last time he gave the test.

If pushed to explain what is the greatest change from life in the 1960s to today, the perception of truth and rightness might take the honors. In the sixties, it seemed to me as a student, all answers were classified by the teacher as either right or wrong, and that ended the discussion. Right was right, and learning was about getting the right answer. Today, with the explosion of information, technology, and scientific research right answers seem to change amazingly fast.

For example, 60s physics classes taught that there were three states of matter: gas, liquid, and solid. Today we know the answer is much more complex, see the Wikipedia listing on the subject for an astonishing update.

From this example, and a myriad of similar knowledge comparisons that could be made, it's clear the answers have changed and expanded. To be successful today, we must keep an open mind and fight the instinctual preference to label answers as right and wrong and allow that we may have to choose a best answer, but only after having considered that a range of workable and equally right possibilities really exists.

## TFS e-Mentor Success Insights

Success means we never stop looking for truth, integrating new knowledge, and allowing the answers to change.

*~John H, (Jack) Shrawder, Exec. Director  
TFS National Faculty Success Center*

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