

IT'S BETTER TO BE THE FIRST OR ONE OF THE FIRST EVEN IF YOU'RE WRONG

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ABSTRACT

I highlight the importance of selecting new, interesting, and important research questions to investigate even if the answers that you uncover are challenged by others and turn out to be wrong. I do this by using examples from the work of an old discredited economist. First I discuss his work on the development of economic models of the determinants of health outcomes. Then I turn to his studies of the relationship between health and schooling. I conclude with his research on the economics of substance use and abuse and on economic aspects of obesity. What insights into behavior can be revealed by asking whether people choose their level of health? Does more schooling cause better health? Do demand functions for such addictive substances as cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine slope downward? Why has the prevalence of obesity increased so dramatically in the past three decades? Come to my presidential address for the answers and for the five rules of research that have guided my career.