

An Interview With Dr. Edwin Land

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Body

Dr. **Edwin Land** was near tears, his head was bowed as he concluded his speech at Polaroid's annual meeting in Needham, Mass. Last month. He had just introduced his new president and chief operating officer, William J. McCune Jr., and in doing so had faced squarely and painfully the problem of his own succession. "You're at bat now," the 66-year-old businessman-inventor said to McCune. Land said he would remain as chairman and director of research. But McCune would be running day-to-day operations.

It will be McCune's job to exploit Land's breakthrough with the SX70 Camera. He will have a breathing spell. Rival Kodak is having problems with the camera it is designing to go with its own instant photography film; Kodak's introduction, once expected this year, now looks at least a year away.

photograph with an SX70 using a Kodak negative to show the camera quality. A month ago someone saw it and said: "You can't use a *Kodak* negative for that." So we said fine and made one of our own. We were thrilled with what we saw, so I said, "Let's make a production coat." The production people called back and said, "He's not serious!" I didn't know I was serious, but they knew from long experience that I was. So they made it.

That was a typical, natural, healthy, relaxful Polaroid undertaking. And it is what makes a good research company -- the ability to react instantly to what you just learned. As Alfred North Whitehead said, the practical man is a man who practices the errors of his forefathers. If you don't have quick reaction time, you go right on for years doing something you know is wrong because you haven't the competence to change it.

You've been quoted as saying that "Every creative act is a sudden cessation of stupidity," and you spend grueling hours to that end. This means you must drive yourself and others.

LAND: I think I'm training others to think that to bring all your powers to focus on the place where it is most needed is not a situation that calls for self-pity, but one that calls for rejoicing in the competence of human beings to do it.

My whole life has been spent trying to teach people that intense concentration for hour after hour can bring out resources in people that they didn't know they had. An awful lot of people were made happy by that negative I mentioned earlier. When they were called upon to meet this opportunity, all of their resources and all of the things they didn't know they knew just came right into focus. You would have thought they had been training for years for this.

Far from being eccentric, I regard this as the quintessence of what industry should be about. I don't regard it as normal for a human being to have an eight-hour day, with two long coffee breaks, with a martini at lunch, with a sleepy period in the afternoon and a rush home to the next martini. I don't think that can be dignified by calling it working and I don't think people should be paid for it.

I would like to see people discover the joy of using all their innate ability, including the ability to share.

You have created a whole industry based on impatience.

LAND: I don't think it has anything to do with impatience. Ask me a question. Okay, now suppose I say, if you will come back in seven days, I will give you the answer. Are you impatient? Well, come back in seven days! Look, if the picture you get instantly is as beautiful as the picture you get by waiting seven days, then it is absolute madness to say that there is virtue in waiting.