

Acceptance speech on Induction to the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame

James Watt Dinner, 28th September 2012

I feel an impostor of course to be aligned with such Titans as Watt, Telford and the rest but perhaps despite the spread of 300yrs, in our course we all shared one very common experience:

Those nay-sayers who said, "It can't be done".

I have always been a reluctant entrepreneur.
And as a severe dyslexic brought up under the crushing heel of old Scottish country schooling, I was by no means deemed academically gifted.
As the headmaster told my mum... *"Don't expect too much of him"...*!

But I always loved to make things.

In founding Optos it was my son's experience that gave me insights into the need to improve imaging the eye.

Life's experience from its very outset – "11plus" failure onwards - taught me the value of questioning the purveyors of accepted wisdom.

A logical approach to problem solving ...
A determination not to be intimidated...
To set aside criticism that did not add value to whatever it was that I was trying to do.... allowed me to get stuff done.

This and a certain strength of will was all it took to open up the creative capability of others to deliver a technology that today is used across the world's leading eye centres daily making a significant difference to patient care.

I am sure Watt and the others shared my formative experience having legions of detractors and few if any folk who thought their endeavours were worth a "hill of beans".

I have been described as "terminally optimistic" and if that's true it's certainly a disposition that helped me, not just deal with, but enjoy what was a rough and chaotic journey along the brink of disaster that was our daily horizon - and will be that of anyone who dares to break new ground.

But at the end of that entire struggle we succeeded in making a valuable imaging device that everyone said was impossible technically, clinically unnecessary, and certainly doomed commercially.

But we owe those Luddites a debt because it was their infuriating scepticism and complacency that gave our thoughts their momentum.
It was their ill-founded sense of certainty that things could not be bettered: so annoying, so irritating; that short of catastrophic collapse we could never let up the struggle.

Against those who are not curious; those who hold too strongly to accepted wisdom as a certain defence of their own status; who would rather rubbish ideas than stimulate those that may have just cause to question.

But of course when all is said and done all innovations have their span. And what is certain is that any advance will soon be surpassed by another better one. And that's only right and proper. My hope is that your institution continues its work; to press the importance of making things.

If the Optos story is an inspiration to others then I am glad.

So as the only living inductee, I thank you in person, for the honour you do me tonight. Thank you.

Douglas Anderson, OBE