

Heilmeier's Catechism

TUT100.32 - Virtue in Animal and Machine
Professor Jerod Weinman

In 1994, writer Joshua Shapiro interviewed George H. Heilmeier, then President and CEO of Bellcore, or Bell Communications Research Inc. [1] Before taking that post, Heilmeier did his doctoral work at Princeton and began his career at RCA Labs, where he eventually became the head of device concepts research. He later became a White House Fellow before directing the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (Darpa). In his interview, Shapiro elicits a set of probing questions that made Heilmeier's leadership so successful. Aspiring proposal authors will do well to make sure their writing answers his questions [1]:

To evaluate research activities at Darpa, Heilmeier formulated a set of questions that so well expresses the fundamentals of his beliefs that he seriously refers to it as his "catechism." He later taught it to his research "novitiates" at Texas Instruments and now enforces its use at Bellcore. Like a preflight checklist, his catechism provides a routine for safely and successfully launching a research project:

- What are you trying to do? Articulate your objectives using absolutely no jargon.
- How is it done today, and what are the limitations of current practice?
- What's new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?
- Who cares? If you're successful, what difference will it make?
- What are the risks and the payoffs?
- How much will it cost? How long will it take?
- What are the midterm and final "exams" to check for success?

References

[1] SHAPIRO, J. George H. Heilmeier. *IEEE Spectrum* 31, 6 (June 1994), 56–59.