Dave's quiet, understated, but ever-present guidance was the key that helped me, as a fumbling junior student, find my way among such a crowd of experts. Dave valued everyone, and we all responded to his attitude by giving our best to the team. Of course, we wanted to advance in our careers, but we also wanted to help each other the way Dave helped each of us. His concern for all was reflected in the patience that the senior researchers showed with me.

My experience is just one example of Dave's exceptional conduct toward his colleagues. Through vicissitudes of competition or technical obstacles to research, Dave has good words for everyone, from junior members of his team to internationally recognized scientists. He is the first to recognize the contributions of others and often the last to point out his own. Many members of the quantum physics community have even feared that his modesty has cost him some appreciation, so this long-deserved Nobel Prize is all the sweeter.

One can hardly overstate Dave's influence on the atomic and quantum physics communities over the past five decades. As with Norman Ramsey, his own PhD adviser a generation earlier, it sometimes seems like half of the field's best researchers have worked with Dave, and the best young physicists in the field still flock to his lab.

Dave's team continues to grow in size and quality and is outstripped only by his own creativity and dedication. Any day now, I fully expect him to astonish me and the rest of his colleagues with yet another new and unlikely idea that somehow turns out beautifully. I hope many more junior PhD students have the same good fortune that I did, the day I came to work for Dave.

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Relativity text recommendation

The article "Teaching general relativity to undergraduates" by Nelson Christensen and Thomas Moore in the June 2012 issue of PHYSICS TODAY (page 41) was very enjoyable. I think I should highlight for your readers an excellent book the authors did not mention in their list of recommended texts, namely *General Relativity: An Introduction for Physicists* by Michael Hobson,

George Efstathiou, and Anthony Lasenby (Cambridge University Press, 2006; reviewed in PHYSICS TODAY, March 2007, page 62).

I received my PhD in theoretical solid-state and low-temperature physics from Texas A&M University in 1978. After an industrial career at Boeing, I retired in 1999. I realized that I needed to stay in shape mentally and that there were extremely interesting areas of physics, including general relativity, about which I knew nothing.

I worked through Bernard Schutz's *A First Course in General Relativity* (discussed in the article) and a couple of other standard texts. Then I discovered the book by Hobson and coauthors. A model of clarity and a joy to read, it is pedagogical and contains remarkably few errors and misprints. I was delighted to see that it includes chapters on the Kerr geometry, inflationary cosmology, and variational approaches to general relativity. One of the best textbooks I've read in any area of physics, it is the one I would use if I were teaching a course on general relativity or cosmology.

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National labs compliance maze stymies foreign visitor

An item by David Kramer in the May 2012 issue of PHYSICS TODAY (page 26) discusses problems between the National Nuclear Security Administration and the weapons laboratories. Compliance with federal management directives is among the central issues. I offer here a pedestrian view to some of the points raised. I am a visiting faculty member from Germany to the unclassified part of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where I have accumulated several years of work experience over the past 15 years.

A new contractor took over the administration of Livermore a few years ago. As with any new contract, compliance is the goal, even though the value of some details turned out to be questionable. As an example, the new contract curtailed travel support for students, stranding those on assignments away from the lab. They had not been thought of beforehand, but the contract could not be violated or changed.

Also under the contract, all rehires are to be considered as new hires, with the full application of new-hire security procedures. The US State Department's visa rules permit me only a string of short-term visas once my multiyear one expired. Thus six weeks after one appointment ended, my being employed for another six weeks required the full rehire and visa procedures. An outside company purporting to do worldwide criminal background investigations was tasked with investigating my career and talking to five personal references in the US and Germany. The process got hung up for weeks for the lack of one essential piece of verification: a confirmation of my degrees and the dates I earned them.

At least five times, the same laboratory—by different proxies—had requested that information from the same German university. In the more than 30 years since I received my PhD, the personnel at my university have probably processed some 200 000 students. Even if they were to understand the meaning of a cryptic form faxed from some US verification company, why would they send somebody to the archives to dig again for records that