THE strength and service of our profession through our three societies depends on the summation of your individual activities. Individually and together we have made plant and soil science outstanding professions. Our achievements in adding to knowledge and in managing the soil-plant ecological complex for the benefit of mankind have been significant group and individual performances.

I could spend the evening speaking on the worldwide importance of our accomplishments, but pride can lead to a downfall. We need to look beyond aspects of forages, pollen grains, and minute pieces of clay. What we do as individuals in professional and social-political arenas is very important.

Professional Development and Responsibility

Some people at universities say that stressing scholastic professionalism develops graduates for the “establishment,” that are not sensitive to social needs. These people propose that dissent to precipitate social change should replace scholarship.

As agronomists, we should be committed to a personal excellence through a scholastic professionalism. As students of the plant-soil-ecological complex or phases of it, our goal is continued professional growth. We must never be satisfied with achievements today or we will surely stagnate tomorrow. As seekers of the truth and as continuously developing persons, we are motivated by a dynamic discontent. Such mental attitudes should stimulate us to progressively higher levels of knowledge and potential service. However, to avoid a neurosis, there must be a dynamic equilibrium in attitude - a positive sense of contributing, yet a realization that we never do as well as we should in attaining and advancing knowledge and professionalism. Continuous growth in professionalism requires originality, creativity, sensitivity to new ideas, flexibility, perseverance, cooperation, and excellence in communication.

We as professionals tend to “over-professionalize” and become dogmatic, thereby, perhaps unknowingly, inhibiting imaginative originality. We must be aware that repression of creativity starts at an early age. The creative fantasies with which our children are born may be destroyed in schools and universities. Educational programs may give way to a regimented training that develops technical skills rather than imagination.

For example, a kindergarten teacher recently asked a class of 5-year-old children to draw a cat. Imagine for a moment how would you draw a cat in a box? Do you see the creative imagination? Do you see the cat in the box? You see only its paw reaching over the edge of the box. Because of a prejudiced concept, the teacher could not see or even imagine the cat, so the child was reprimanded and driven onto that long and dreary road of conventionalism. He was forced to adopt a protective practice: “Hereafter, I’ll analyze the teacher and answer in her way.”

Are not such repressive practices of authoritarianism often common in our daily dealings with students, colleagues, and others in universities, in government, and in industry today? Students and others who make analyses that differ sharply from our views are often crucified. Because of authoritative dogmatic professionalism, of which we may not even be aware, students and associates become inhibited. They soon learn to diagnose the off-limit areas in communication. Now we get only the answers we want!