

## The Man of the Century:

Dr. Adler died in February. He was ninety-three. I probably should have written about him sooner but it's a daunting task to talk about the most important person of the twentieth century. A newspaper column is only so big. Only so many words. Britannica it's not. Besides, there are volumes written elsewhere about him and his accomplishments. No need to go over all of it here.

I don't exactly recall when I first felt his influence. I believe it was in the middle 1960's. Anyway, the date is not so important. What matters is that he changed my life and the lives of virtually everyone in the developed world. I think he had a greater impact on men than he did on women although his effect on both sexes is undeniable. Men seemed to take to his work more naturally, without thinking, like an extension of one's own anatomy. Like chain saws and guns.

I suppose part of his genius was his ability to recognize a need that all humans have. A need that is absolutely basic and yet overlooked by everyone, until Robert Adler came along. His idea to marry science and psychology was pure genius. There are scarce few giants in all of history who had both the instinct to know what the public needs and the technological expertise to answer that need with something concrete. It's one thing to say, "What this world needs is a better mouse trap!" and quite another to produce them by the millions. I know that in our house Adler's "better mousetrap" is an absolutely essential part of daily life. Misplace it for even a few minutes and something akin to panic sets in.

He has his critics and there are more than a few. Cardiologists and Physical Therapists alike blame him for significant increases in heart disease and muscular atrophy throughout the population. Not to mention the fact that he caused countless conflicts between couples, roommates and family members. Domestic harmony was definitely not his forte. He probably never even gave a second thought to the effect he would have on personal relationships. But, in fairness, how can we truly know what is to come when we dare to change the world. I mean, it would hardly be fair to blame Ben Franklin for hair drier electrocutions, would it?

Part of the problem with greatness is that we don't know where it's going. Actually, come to think of it, it's up to the rest of us how a great idea will eventually play out. We take technologies, concepts or products and put them to good use or bad use. The printing press was most certainly not an inherently harmful invention but it sure has been misused over the years. Bill O'Reilly's books, for instance.

My point is that, in itself, Dr. Adler's great achievement is neither good nor bad. How we have used it has made all the difference.

I guess it's even more to his credit that he continued to work and invent and lead for decades after his idea changed the world. One hundred ninety-six patents later he was still on the job. Most of us would have kicked back, counted the money and stopped answering the phone. Not Adler. Special people keep on doing what they do. That's who they are.

Anyway, all of this is just my way of nodding respectfully in his direction, now that he's gone. A little acknowledgement of the scientist who redefined America and the world. A tip of the hat to the man who made it possible for us to go anywhere on the planet and beyond, still seated in our favorite recliner.

Maybe you're wondering why the good Doctor was so important. Until a couple of days ago I didn't know who he was either. In 1956 Dr. Robert Adler invented the Zenith Space Command ultrasonic remote control, the first TV remote. Which, even more importantly, led directly to the development of that ubiquitous hybrid tuber, now a standard in living rooms the world over, the couch potato.