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## DIY

# Happy Birthday, Leonardo! The Grandfather of DIY

By Dawn Swain April 15, 2014

There are few figures who will come to mind as readily as Leonardo da Vinci when the topic of influence in science comes up.



No other person has been as iconic or has contributed as much over so many disciplines as da Vinci, and it could be argued that our entire understanding of the universe as a whole and modern technology in particular is indebted to his work and vision.

Leonardo da Vinci was born on this day in 1452, and his reputation as the preeminent Renaissance polymath is second to none. His insatiable curiosity and tireless search for the truth of all things from art to physics to aerodynamics to medicine to engineering led to his invention of countless devices. Rather than wax poetic here on his numerous accomplishments (which you can find cataloged just about anywhere on the internet), let's discuss a little about this polymath concept.

A polymath is someone who does many things well enough that he or she can claim professional status. In da Vinci's case, he was paid as a painter, sculptor, engineer, mathematician, and astronomer (astrologer), among other things. These days with the intense focus on specialization and focused results, it's rare to run across any true polymaths. What's beautiful about the way our modern society is shaping up, though, is that anyone can pursue multiple disciplines without necessarily having to be a professional – and sometimes amateurs can produce better results than the pros! In astronomy alone, [amateurs have found more new exoplanets](#) than their professional counterparts, often because they are not constrained by traditional organizations.

What can you do to pursue the polymath lifestyle? Pick a hobby – electronics, robotics, astronomy, what-have-you – and make the time to dig into it. Take trips to local museums and exhibits, build plans, and get together with others who share that same passion. It's easy to pick up the basics with DIY kits and then let your imagination run. Build something Leonardo would be proud of. The key, though, is not to let yourself get limited to only one range of ideas.

What if da Vinci had met with a modern-day guidance counselor: "Math? Art? Physics? Medicine? Engineering? Come on, Leo, you can't to *all* of this, just pick one!" Can you imagine how much science we just wouldn't have today?

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