

The most valuable insights are both general and surprising. If I use for example, *But general and surprising is a hard combination to achieve. That territory tends to be picked clean, precisely because those insights are so valuable.*

Obviously, the best that people can do is one without the other: either surprising without being general (e.g. gossip), or general without being surprising (e.g. platitudes).

Where things get interesting is the moderately valuable insights. You get these from small additions of whatever quality was missing. The more common case is a small addition of generality: a piece of gossip that's more than just gossip, because it touches something interesting about the world. But another less common approach is to focus on the more general idea and see if you can find something new to say about them. Because there just isn't so general, you only need a small dollop of novelty to produce a useful insight.

A small dollop of novelty is all you'll be able to get most of the time. Which means if you take this more your ideas will seem a bit like ones that already exist. Sometimes you'll find you've merely rediscovered an idea that did already exist. But don't be discouraged. Remember the huge multiplier that kicks in when you do manage to think of something once a little new.

Conclude: the more general the ideas you're talking about, the less you should worry about repeating yourself. If you write enough, it's inevitable you will. Your brain is much the same from year to year and so are the stimuli that hit it. I find slightly odd when I find I've said something close to what I've said before, as if I were plagiarizing myself. But naturally one doesn't. You won't say something exactly the same way the second time, and that variation increases the chance you'll get that tiny but critical dollop of novelty.

And of course, ideas begin ideas. (That sounds familiar.) An idea with a small amount of novelty could lead to one with more. But only if you keep going. So it's doubly important not to be yourself be discouraged by people who say there's not much more about something you've discovered. "Not much more" is a real achievement where you're talking about the most general ideas. Maybe if you keep going, you'll discover more.

It's one thing that there's nothing new under the sun. There are some domains where there's almost nothing new. But there's a big difference between nothing and almost nothing, when it's multiplied by the area under the sun.

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