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**THE CAREERS
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Robert Lang is a master of metamorphosis. He has folded sheets of paper into cuckoo clocks, nuns, inflatable bunnies and three-dimensional likenesses of Jimmy Carter and Darth Vader. The California physicist has also transformed his career in applied lasers into the full-time pursuit of origami — the 400-year-old Japanese art of folding paper (see www.langorigami.com).

For Lang, origami helped him cope with his day-to-day pressures, and his advancement in it mirrors his scientific progression. He folded his way through a master's in electrical engineering at Stanford, and designed more than 50 pieces — including a hermit crab, a mouse in a mousetrap, an ant and a skunk — as a way to relieve stress during his PhD dissertation at the California Institute of Technology.

Along the way, he has managed to affect both physics and origami, according to a recent article in *The New Yorker*. He has altered origami by coming up with computer-based models for ever-more-sophisticated fold patterns, as well as pioneering the use of lasers to score paper according to his complex designs. And he has changed physics by lending origami methods to other disciplines that faced vexing spatial-relations puzzles — from designing a foldable pouch for medical instruments that could be opened without contaminating the sterile tools inside, to a mesh device that could be implanted via a tube, but that on release would unfold and support the heart.

His full-time embrace of professional origami came about by necessity as much as creativity. During the dot-com collapse earlier this decade, Lang's duties at computer components company JDS Uniphase in San Jose shifted from overseeing research to eliminating jobs, cutting pay and closing plants. So he figured out a way to turn his creative passion into a profession.

Lang's story says a lot about how creativity and hobbies can inform both science itself and careers within it. I'm not suggesting that all researchers should leave the bench to follow their hobbies full-time, whether they be scrimshaw, macramé or gnome collecting. But Lang's profession shows that transformation — in the way we think about both scientific problems and career paths — is always a possibility.

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