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THE CHANGING FACE OF RESEARCH

Research is changing. I recently had a conversation with an acquaintance regarding "research." It went something like this: "We are interested in doing anything to bring in the dollars—what ideas do you have that we can further develop and that we might play into funding?" On my drive home that evening, that conversation and the haunting words "doing anything to bring in the dollars and play into funding" struck a discord in the conscience of my academic and professional harmony, but even more so in the very root of what got me into this profession in the first place—my interest in wood as a material. I believe that we as professionals choosing to work in our preferred field of wood science and technology have a different take on wood research and the progress we make while seeking answers to challenging questions. I am almost insulted that someone from "outside" this discipline views our career-chosen body of science and knowledge as simply a quick pick for the taking—a flash in the pan for the dollar. This conscienceless approach to research lacks depth, forethought, and continuity and will surely lead to shallow, deliverable-oriented research that is conducted on the fly. "Let the private sector pick it up if it needs doing" is simply too shortsighted for us as a profession and does not offer our body of science the continuity needed over time to make real progress on research issues. I think we will continue to see this "new" approach to research continue as declining federal and state funding further weakens existing research programs. Our greatest loss will be the continuity and conscience of our profession—something that has taken more than half a century to develop in this

country. We let this happen to ourselves, you know.

Seldom, although not usual, a bolt of inspiration comes to someone working in an allied field of study and we in the wood community benefit from the knowledge and breadth of a new idea or a different approach. Many great gains in wood research have come from related disciplines. But you know, most of those gains coming from "other" disciplines came from special people, with honorable intentions. Consider Bob Youngs' recent words to honor the late Dr. John Siau, "John came from one of the related disciplines that combine to make wood science and technology the exciting and productive amalgam it has become. . . He was attracted, as most of us are, to the rich potential, the elusive mystery, and the natural warmth of wood and its essential role as a resource for maintaining and advancing the human condition and the world we all share." Beautiful words, Bob, and nicely written; I'd vote for you if you ran! What you did was capture the conscience of our profession in those honorable words used to remember John Siau and his great contributions to the field of wood science and technology. This rings far and so very different from those words above "We are interested in doing anything to bring in the dollars—what ideas do you have that we can further develop and that we might play into funding?"

As our research climate continues to change, I think we as a community should guard against the midnight raiders, but keep the gate open for those of honorable intention. And it is not so hard to tell the difference. We should wear our professional conscience proudly, but hum-

bly, on our chest. We should remain the soul and caretakers of this rewarding profession. This is what we need to convey to our funding agencies. This is the image we must convey to our research clients. This is what makes us tick as a profession. After all, we are a profession,

not a temporary job placement service. Let's work together to make sure we don't become one.

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