



Councilor Report : Dallas and Boston National Meetings

by Dennis Chamot and John Borchardt

One of the major pieces of business at the Dallas meeting was presentation of PEG revisions for consideration. The Professional Employment Guidelines have been substantially rewritten and reorganized by CEPA (the Council Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs). The suggested new version no longer has "employer" and "chemical professional" sections, but rather it is organized by subject. Where appropriate, specific guidance to the employer or the professional is given. While some may prefer the older arrangement, most of what was in there has been retained. Much of the discussion of PEG at the Dallas Council meeting indicated frustration with the elimination of mass termination investigations and the corresponding reports in *C&EN*. We, too, feel the frustration, but the problem is not with the PEG, per se, but rather with the difficulty in getting information about terminations. Over time, employers were less cooperative with ACS investigators. For a while, information could be gotten from the terminees, but eventually, this source of information also dried up as employers required employees not to discuss the terminations in exchange for providing some severance benefits and assistance with job searches. The problem has not been eliminated, but the ability of the ACS to deal with mass terminations has declined. In any case, PEG will not disappear. The new edition was approved at the Boston Council meeting. [Further information on PEG is

available from the ACS Department of Career Services].

With the latest revision of the Professional Employment Guidelines now completed, the Council Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs (CEPA) is about to begin work on updating the corresponding Academic Guidelines. This should be a major revision. Watch for further details.

The U.S. Department of Labor is developing a searchable database that will include a substantial amount of information on various kinds of jobs -- training requirements, average salary, skills required, and so on. Once completed, and kept updated, this should prove to be a very useful tool for students, new graduates, and college guidance councilors, as well as experienced chemists seeking a career change. Dennis Chamot, as a representative of the Council Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs (CEPA) visited the Department of Labor with Jean Parr, director of the ACS Department of Career Services, to see a demonstration of an early version of this program. Its potential was very apparent, although the material on chemists was too simplified. We offered to help the DoL folks improve this section, an offer they were happy to accept. A task force involving CEPA, the Committee on Professional Training,

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THE CAREER PLATEAU AND CHANGING JOBS

John K. Borchardt

Is your career plateaued? Many of us experience the career plateau at one or more points in our careers. You are in a career plateau when you cannot expect promotion in the foreseeable future. With corporate downsizing and the reduction in the number of layers of management, many mid-career chemists face the frustration of few advancement opportunities. Of course, many bench chemists and staff engineers are also plateaued. As a result of corporate reengineering, many of us are encountering the career plateau sooner in our careers than in the past.

An improved job market may give you the option of changing jobs. However, deciding to change jobs is a decision that should be made only after careful thought. One must often balance job satisfaction and fulfillment against a reluctance to change jobs due to the loss of retirement and other benefits. If a job change requires relocation, there are also the effects on the lives of family members to consider.

Recognizing The Plateau

There are many symptoms of the career plateau. The most obvious is when others, particularly those at your grade level, are promoted but you are not. Meeting your requests for a transfer or a change in your job responsibilities with prevarication or denial without explanation is another clear signal. A third is if your salary has nearly reached the maximum of your grade level and your annual raises have become significantly less than those of your peers. Another is if it has been more than about three years since your last promotion or the last significant change in your job responsibilities. This last may vary according to the average frequency of promotion and job transfer in your company. Additional symptoms include others being assigned to work on your ideas. Transfer of some of your important responsibilities to others with no comparable transfer of responsibilities to you is another clear sign.

Besides the limitations of a smaller work force and a redesigned corporate structure, the primary reason for the career plateau is perceived limits of your competence and abilities. These include political problems with management that may be perceived as lack of interpersonal skills or insufficient company loyalty.

Strategic Responses To The Career Plateau

There are five strategies you can take to respond to the career plateau. The first is acceptance. Your planned retirement date may determine whether this is an acceptable strategy for you. However, beware. Simple acceptance may make you a prime candidate for job loss in the event of a large-scale staff reduction.

Job enrichment, acquiring new competencies, and transfer to another department are all reasonable strategies that may apply to your career plateau situation. Tactics to put these strategies into effect are discussed below. Finally, there is the strategy of changing jobs. I believe this should be an option to pursue if the results of the other strategies listed above are unsatisfactory.

Tactics - Inside The Company

So what can you do to change these perceptions and break out of the career plateau without changing jobs? If your management is open-minded, achieving outstanding job performance will change their minds. This happened to me about ten years ago when our enhanced oil recovery program was terminated due to low oil prices. There was a reluctance to transfer me to a meaningful program; I was perceived to be a specialist in oilfield chemistry who knew little else. So when an opportunity in pulp and paper chemicals came along, I seized it and worked 60+ hour weeks to succeed. Both the program and I did well and I received a number of benefits including a promotion.

Another possible solution is job enrichment – asking for (or taking) additional responsibilities. Look for opportunities to contribute outside the definition of your responsibilities. Teach short courses to customers. Present papers at trade association meetings that promote interest in your company's products. Write company technical bulletins or work on developing your firm's website. You can do this even if you are not a computer guru by contributing content - information to be posted on the website.

Volunteer to serve on special committees or for inter-departmental assignments. You'll meet people from other departments and learn about new developments in other parts of the company. One of these could develop into a new assignment that could help you break out of the plateau and take your career to a new level.

You could also mentor less experienced coworkers.

Boredom due to lack of intellectual stimulation and challenge are often symptoms of the career plateau. All the approaches outlined above inject additional variety into your job and combat these symptoms even if they don't cure the disease – the career plateau. A lateral job transfer can also combat boredom by injecting new interest into your work. The transfer also may provide you with a new manager who is more likely to judge you by your current performance and less by preconceived attitudes.

Tactics - Outside The Company

Often the stimulation of outside interests and activities can help compensate for the frustration and lack of stimulation of a plateaued career. Become active in professional societies, particularly those relevant to your employer's business interests. Serve on committees or present papers at conferences.

Expand your skills through short courses. These may be on technical or management subjects. Other education options include college evening classes or special programs such as Toastmasters International.

Become a mentor to struggling students. Chemists and engineers can be particularly helpful in coaching students trying to improve their math and science skills. Help a good cause through community service.

One caveat – these “outside the company” tactics have limitations. They can help you deal with the frustrations of the career plateau. However, if they don't change the on-the-job perceptions people have of you, they won't help you break out of the plateau.

Try the approaches that suit your employment situation and your skills and personality before deciding to enter the job market.

Based on a presentation at the symposium, “Stay or Go: Deciding Whether or Not to Change Jobs,” ACS national meeting, Boston, Massachusetts, August 24, 1998. John Borchardt is a DPR councilor, and was the organizer of the symposium.

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Corporation Associates, and the Society Committee on Education was formed to pursue this with the DoL. The ACS effort is centered in the Department of Career Services.

John Borchardt serves on the CEPA Subcommittee on Professional Services and Programs. At the Dallas meeting, the subcommittee members agreed to collect information on the professional activities and programs various ACS committees and divisions are engaged in. The idea is for CEPA to serve as an information clearing house and facilitator. John Borchardt made these contacts and received substantial feedback by the Boston meeting. Organizations as varied as the Division of Polymer Chemistry and the Division of Petroleum Chemistry are becoming involved in programming. At the Anaheim national meeting next Spring CEPA (as well as DPR) will cosponsor the Division of Petroleum Chemistry's symposium "Effect of Oil Industry Mergers on Chemists' Careers." CEPA will also cosponsor a Women Chemists Committee symposium scheduled for the same meeting, "Mergers and Splits – Tips for the Changing Workplace." The professional and career-oriented component of ACS national meetings will benefit from increased DPR programming and professional programming organized by other divisions and ACS committees.

Finally, Dennis Chamot is happy to report that he was elected to the Council Policy Committee. CPC is one of three committees whose members are elected directly by the members of the Council, and serves as the executive committee of the Council. The three year term begins January 1, 1999.

Henry Hill Award: Call for Nominations

The Henry Hill Award is the major award of the Division of Professional Relations. First awarded in 1984, to former ACS president and long time activist Alan Nixon, it has since been bestowed upon a distinguished group of individuals* who all share a common interest in promoting the professional well being of chemical professionals.

Nominations are being solicited for next year's recipient. A letter of nomination and any relevant supporting material should be sent to the chairman of the Henry Hill Award nominations committee *to be received no later than December 1.*

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*Previous Henry Hill Awardees:

Alan Nixon
Warren Niederhauser
Gordon Nelson
Fred Owens
William Bailey
Attila Pavlath
Clayton Callis
Tom Fitzsimmons
Dennis Chamot
Madeleine Joullie
John Connolly
Stanley Kirschner
James Shoffner
Ann Nalley
Susan Fahrenheit

DPR – TOASTMASTERS DIRECTORY PLANNED

John Borchardt is putting together a list of people who are members of both DPR and Toastmasters International. Toastmasters is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping its members improve their public speaking skills through a series of speech projects of increasing complexity. Many presentations at ACS national and regional meetings would qualify as Toastmaster speech projects. The problem is that you need a Toastmaster member of an active club in the audience to evaluate your speech. While it is easy for the speaker to provide the speech evaluation form, it is much more difficult to locate a Toastmasters member willing to attend your ACS paper.

A database of DPR members who are also Toastmasters will be prepared. That way, a DPR member giving a paper at an ACS meeting could contact Toastmasters members and determine who is attending the ACS meeting in question and could evaluate

his/her speech. DPR members would get double mileage out of their paper: the ACS paper and Toastmasters project credit.

If you are a Toastmasters member and want to participate, please send the following information: your name, your e-mail address if you have one, your U.S. mail address, the fields of chemistry in which you work, and the name of your Toastmasters club, to:

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Depending on the response, we might publish the list in the DPR Newsletter. Alternatively, John will send it to the respondents (and only the respondents) when responses stop coming in. Perhaps later we could expand this list to all ACS members but for now it is a benefit for DPR members giving any type of ACS paper, not just a paper for DPR.

Member-Get-A-Member

The Division of Professional Relations is the only ACS national division that is devoted to the chemical professional rather than to chemistry or related subjects. DPR symposia and publications have dealt with employment trends, career development issues, pensions, financial planning for chemists, age discrimination, compensation for employed inventors, and many other issues of importance to chemical professionals at all degree levels. DPR officers and members have promoted and supported the Society's professional services. A great deal has been accomplished. But issues remain. We need YOUR support, and the support and activity of more ACS members. Volunteer to chair a symposium; contribute an article for the Bulletin; GET A COLLEAGUE TO JOIN THE MEMBER ORIENTED DIVISION! Have them send in the form below, or a copy, with a check for \$6.00 for dues (**pays through 1999!**)

Name _____

Address _____

SEND TO: Michael J. Brownfield
Secretary, DPR
3122 Parnell Ave.
Ft. Wayne, IN 46805-2128

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