



**Guest editorial:**

**We are all in this together!**

**Attila Pavlath**

**Immediate Past Chair, DPR**

Perhaps you read my ACS Comment in the Dec. 14 issue of *C&EN*. While the title is the same, the emphasis is quite different. That Comment was directed to all segments of our profession, sometimes with widely differing views, asking them to search for a solution as to how we can bridge the gap between us. This piece is a special appeal to members of our Division. I ask you to read this short message carefully. I hope it will induce you to action.

If you are a member of the Division you do not have to be convinced that our profession is facing serious problems. When you joined DPR, you might not have been certain that the Division could solve those problems. You might have even thought that the problems are so big that no one can solve them, but you were willing to give it a try. The fact that you are still a member indicates that you do not consider it hopeless. However, you might be wondering about what can be done and mostly how long it will take. This is where the title of this short message comes in.

As I am finishing my term at the helm of the Division, I have to express my great admiration to the active members whose devoted work made possible another successful year for the Division in 1998. Without them, my job would have been very difficult and frustrating. However, we need more than just the maintenance of the day-to-day work of the Division. We have over 1000 members. While I am grateful for their loyal support, I am making an appeal to everyone to help.

The help does not necessarily mean physical presence at our business meetings, though it would be more than welcome. I ask you to start dialogues with your colleagues to alert them to the problems if they are oblivious to them. Encourage them to talk to others. Discuss with them the problems and search for possible solutions. I emphasize the word "possible". Sometimes we dismiss ideas because they seem improbable and we do not want to waste time on them. My view is that everything is possible if you set your mind to it. I do not want to throw out any idea, even if you think it is hopeless. We can discuss it in more detail and perhaps during the discussion we come up with a way to get around the obstacle or find another solution to the problem. Please, contact me by mail (WRRC, 800 Buchanan, Albany CA 94710), phone (510-559-5620), FAX(510-559-5818) or E-mail (aep22@xtrn.org or apavlath@pw.usda.gov) with your thoughts even if you think that nothing can be done. I am looking forward to hear from you.

Attila E. Pavlath

# SHIFTING CHEMICAL EMPLOYMENT PERSPECTIVES

John K. Borchardt

1998 may set a record – a very undesirable record of having more layoffs than any other year of the 1990s. The big outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas follows the number of employees laid off. CEO James Challenger reports, “The dramatic job-cutting spree has turned 1998 into the second-worst-year of the decade. Downsizings have been explosive since September, many concentrated in major job sectors of the economy – steel, oil, semiconductors – suggesting there is a lot more to come as the impact filters downstream.” Layoffs in the 11 months ending November (574,629) are only modestly behind the 12-month total of 615,189 for the worst year of the decade, 1993.

The many oil industry mergers are having a major impact on chemists' careers. The impact of these mergers on chemists' careers will be discussed in a symposium organized by two former oil company chemists, Geoff Dolbear and Art Stipanovic, as part of the ACS national meeting in New Orleans in August.

Mergers, divestitures, and switches to a life science emphasis are continuing in the chemical industry and reducing R&D employment. Life sciences including the pharmaceutical industry offer the few bright spots in the chemistry employment picture.

Recently published comments (*Chemical & Engineering News*, November 2, 1998) suggest that the reported unemployment rate for chemists (currently 2.3%) is probably low by a factor of 2-3. This finding changes the relationship between the unemployment rate for chemists and the general unemployment rate. Previous employment articles in *C&EN* frequently and proudly noted that the unemployment rate for chemists was substantially less than that for working people in general, making chemistry a good career choice. This conclusion is much weaker now.

What can we as individuals do? Rather than trying to change irreversible trends or just complaining, I've long been an advocate of chemical professionals (chemists, engineers, and technicians) taking constructive action to keep their technical and professional skills up-to-date. Professional skills include career management skills to reduce the possibility that you will involuntarily lose your job and job hunting skills. I also believe that “parallel careers” can offer personal and professional broadening opportunities as well as later alternative employment opportunities. The ACS has long promoted alternative careers, publishing an entire book on the subject (“Careers for Chemists: A World Outside the Lab”).

One such parallel career is being a part-time faculty member at a nearby college. DPR members Mike Brownfield and Tom Strom discussed this option last August as part of the “Stay or Go: Deciding Whether to Change Jobs” symposium sponsored by DPR at the Boston ACS national meeting. Part-time teaching options will be discussed from a different perspective in a DPR-sponsored symposium in March 1999 at the Anaheim ACS national meeting (see program notice elsewhere in this issue).

We can support ourselves and others through concerned sections of ACS such as the Council Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs, the Office of Career Services, the Younger Chemists Committee and the divisions of Professional Relations and of Chemical Technicians. We can set up job hunting clubs in our local sections such as the Indiana section has done, or the Chemical/Engineering Opportunities Office operation by the Greater Houston section and the Gulf Coast section of the Society of Petroleum Engineers. We can help others by becoming local section career advisors. We can use the skills we learn helping others to later help ourselves should the need arise.

DPR needs your perspectives on career-related concerns. Consider working with Tom Kucera to organize a symposium at a national or regional meeting, present a paper, or present a poster at Sci-Mix. We're all in this together.

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## **On-Line Professional Data Bank**

The ACS Department of Career Services is pleased to announce the release of the On-line Professional Data Bank (PDB). The Online PDB gives members a free and easy way to post their skills, experience, and areas of interest in a searchable database. Employers use this Internet recruiting tool when searching for candidates to fill their open positions. They know they'll find skilled chemical professionals among the membership of the ACS. No other scientific society offers a career management service of such value to its members.

Members facing a job change or considering making a career transition should try the On-line PDB. It's free, it's state-of-the-art, and it's entirely confidential. Candidates may choose to maintain an active listing (where their profile is posted immediately to a searchable database) or remain inactive for awhile (the profile is saved until the candidate wishes to switch to the active listing). All communication between employers and candidates is handled through an e-mail system created just for the PDB. Using the latest technology, candidate profiles can not be viewed by other users; only qualified employers who register with the ACS may gain access to the database. And an additional confidentiality option allows members to block their contact information and creates a blind e-mail address so even members currently employed can use the system without risk.

A new landscape is developing in today's employment climate; to keep one's footing, chemists need to develop their own career management plan. Lifelong employment with one organization has become a retreating reality. Employment data support the prediction that job changes will become more frequent, and more members will start their careers as temporary employees. Career self-management is a necessity for all chemists. Check out the newest addition to the menu of career management tools available from ACS and take advantage of your member benefits. Available through ChemCenter at [www.chemcenter.org](http://www.chemcenter.org).

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## ***SYMPOSIUM AT ACS NATIONAL MEETING, ANAHEIM***

### **Changing Trends in Academic Ranks: The Drift Toward Part-time, Temporary, Adjunct, and Non-tenured Positions**

Join us on March 22, beginning at 1:00 pm, for a timely discussion of this very important issue. Organized by Grace Borowitz and Ann Nalley, the symposium includes speakers from the American Association of University Professors, New York University, the American Federation of Teachers, and the California State Universities at Chico and Long Beach.