

CONNECTIONS: STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

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The English clergyman and poet, John Donne (1623), said “*No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main . . .*” and this passage is certainly applicable as I stand here today. You do me a singular honor with this Distinguished Service Award, but it is an honor with many authors. Time and space preclude my listing the many that have helped and mentored me along the way. Suffice it to say they and you have my humble appreciation and thanks—“no man is an island.”

In thinking about this address, I asked the question “what could I say that has not been said before?” Communications is a pet concern of mine, but numerous past recipients have discussed it more eloquently than I would be able to do. In addressing professional communication, Warren Thompson (1997) stated “*If communication is the hallmark of man, then a lack of communication is assuredly his nemesis.*” Arno Schniewind (1991) said “*I wish for multifaceted communication that goes out to the readers of Wood and Fiber Science for the ultimate benefit of the profession.*” That wish of his has surely come true with the quality of *Wood and Fiber Science* and its distinguished list of editors. Other honorees have weighed in on the communications issue, not the least which was George Marra for whom our writing award is named. His love of good writing was echoed in Bob Young’s reminiscence of George’s contributions to wood science (Young 2002).

If not communication, then what about education and the status, role, and future of the Society? Alas, several had discussed the issues including Dick Thomas (1999), Tom Maloney (2001), Jim Bowyer (2003), and Tom McLain (2009). Duane Lyon (2006) asked “*Did the golden age of our profession and our Professional Society occur in the 1970s, when research efforts, student enrollments, and society membership peaked, or is the golden age still ahead of us?*”

Then perhaps I could talk about some aspect of wood and wood science as Sandy Marra (2008) and Frank Beall (2002) had done, but my views on wood preservation and composite durability are well known and have already been described in detail in the literature. I turn, therefore, to subject matter off the beaten path for a professional society, so bear with me.

How many of you remember the science show “*Connections*” (1978) and its several sequels and spinoffs (*Connections*² [1994], *Connections*³ [1997], *The Day the Universe Changed* [1985]) by the noted science historian James Burke (1995)? This series explored an alternative view of change. Burke would start each episode with some event or innovation in the past and trace the path from that event to some fundamental or essential aspect, phenomenon, or innovation in today’s modern world, eg touchstone to magnetism to electricity to cloud chamber to radar and nuclear weaponry. My favorite is a spinoff from his treatment of the development of coal gas. In the episode “*The Long Chain*” he starts with the invention of the Fluyt freighter in Holland in the 1500s. Voyages were insured by Edward Lloyd (Lloyd’s of London) if the ships’ hulls were covered in pitch and tar (originally

procured from Scandinavia until the Great Northern War [1700-1721] and the War of Spanish Succession [1701-1714] and later from the American colonies until the American Revolution in 1776). In Culross, Scotland, Archibald Cochrane (9th Earl of Dundonald) tried to distill coal vapor to get coal tar for ships' hulls. It fell to the Scotsman, William Murdoch, a former partner of James Watt, to invent coal gas lighting in the early 1790s. My spin starts with the addlepatented Scotsman, Cochrane, whose initial experiment unfortunately blew up. One of the byproducts of gas production was fouling the streams around the gasworks so another Scotsman found that one could dissolve rubber into the stuff and if you coated fabric with it, it would become waterproof. The solvent was naphtha and raingear of today still carries the name the inventor, (Charles) Macintosh. In 1838, John Bethell devised a method for impregnating another of the coal tar distillates, creosote, into wood thus launching the modern timber preservation era. With modifications, the process is still used today.

My point of this analogy is that we build on the shoulders of giants and hopefully we learn from them. It has been my distinct pleasure to know most of the previous Distinguished Service Award recipients and that list is a good example of connections. Let me illustrate with a personal list of connections. I was privileged to have studied under four former recipients (Skaar, Choong, Côté, Thompson), worked for three (Koch, Thompson, Nearn), worked on faculty with one (Lyon), and had the good fortune to work in societal affairs with a majority of the others. That is, of course, if you do not count Carol Ovens for whom we all worked.

Let me start things off with a little philosophy from the Peanuts creator, Charles Schultz. You do not actually have to take the quiz. Just think about the answers and you will get the awesome point! Here is the first quiz:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Wimbledon winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss Universe contest.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Cup winners in football (soccer).

How did you do? The facts are that none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields, but the applause dies, awards tarnish, achievements are forgotten, and accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here is another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name half a dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Easier? The lesson: **The people who make a difference in your life** are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. **They are the ones who care.** Charles Schultz said *"Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. . . . It's already tomorrow in Australia."*

One should not go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; one needs to be able to throw something back! Now some lessons to help us think about the way we treat people and how can we throw back.

FIRST IMPORTANT LESSON: WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND

Cleaning Lady

During the second month of college for a new student, a professor gave the class a pop quiz. The student was conscientious and had breezed through the questions until he read the last one: *“What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?”* Surely this was some kind of joke. He had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her 50s, but how would he know her name? He handed in his paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward the quiz grade.

“Absolutely,” said the professor. *“In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say ‘hello.’”*

He never forgot that lesson. He also learned her name was Dorothy.

What Goes Around, Comes Around

NEXT IMPORTANT LESSON: ALWAYS REMEMBER THOSE WHO SERVE

The Tip

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-yr-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him.

“How much is an ice cream sundae?” he asked. *“Fifty cents,”* replied the waitress.

The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. *“Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?”* he inquired.

By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. *“Thirty-five cents,”* she replied brusquely.

The little boy again counted his coins. *“I’ll have the plain ice cream,”* he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table, and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier, and left. When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped down the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies. You see, he could not have the sundae because he had to have enough left to leave her a tip. ***He remembered those who serve.***

NEXT IMPORTANT LESSON: EVERY OBSTACLE PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE OUR CONDITION

The Obstacle in Our Path

In ancient times, a King had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king’s wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the King for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way. Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally

succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the King indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many of us never understand!

Every Obstacle Presents an Opportunity to Improve Our Condition

FOURTH IMPORTANT LESSON: GIVE WHEN IT COUNTS

Giving When It Counts

Many years ago, a volunteer working at a hospital got to know a little girl named Liz who was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-yr-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. I saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, *“Yes I’ll do it if it will save her.”* As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheek. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded.

He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, *“Will I start to die right away?”* Being young, the little boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give his sister all of his blood to save her but he had chosen to save her anyway.

Give When It Counts

LAST LESSON: THE HARDEST THING TO LEARN IN LIFE IS WHICH BRIDGE TO CROSS AND WHICH TO BURN

Glass of Milk

On a walking trip up through northern Pennsylvania one spring, Howard Kelly stopped by a small farm house for a drink of cool spring water. A little girl answered his knock and instead of water brought him a glass of fresh milk. After a short friendly visit, he went on his way. Some years later, that same little girl came to him for an operation. Just before she left for home, her bill was brought into the room and across the face she read these words:

“Paid in full with one glass of milk”

(Signed) Dr. Howard Kelly

Howard Kelly (1858-1943) was one of the four founders of Johns Hopkins, the first medical research university in the US.

There is a saying that goes something like this: Bread cast on the waters comes back to you. The good deed you do today may benefit you or someone you love at the least expected time. If you never see the deed again, at least you will have made the world a better place, and, after all, is not that what life is all about?

The Hardest Thing to Learn in Life Is Which Bridge to Cross and Which to Burn

Use your imagination to catch a vision of the person you were meant to be. Bob Richards (1959), in his book “The Heart of a Champion,” tells the story of Charley Paddock, who was a great speaker and loved to talk to young high schoolers. Once the former Olympic champion was talking to such a group and challenged “*If you think you can, you can. If you believe a thing strongly enough, it can come to pass in your life.*” Later, lifting his hand, he said “*Who knows but what there’s an Olympic champion here in this auditorium this afternoon.*” Later, a spindly legged black kid said to him “*Gee Mr, Paddock, I’d give anything if I could be an Olympic champion just like you.*” Later that spindly legged boy won four gold medals in Berlin. His name was Jessie Owens.

After the 1936 Olympics, Jessie Owens was fêted in his hometown of Cleveland with a parade. A young, skinny black kid, part of the crowd surrounding him, said “*Gee Mr. Owens, one of these days I’m going to be an Olympic champion just like you.*” Jessie gave him words of encouragement and told him if he worked hard, it could come to pass. The frail young kid, nicknamed “Bones” by his friends, ran all the way home and told his grandmother “*I’m going to be an Olympic champion just like Jessie Owens.*”

In Wembley Stadium, 1946, the finalists in the Olympic 100-m dash lined up. In the outside lane was an unlikely American whose specialty was the hurdles but who had failed to make the event in the US trials. The gun sounded, the runners flashed down the track, and at the tape, the surprising winner was in the outside lane. His name was Harrison “Bones” Dillard, the only man to win gold in both the 100-m dash (1948) and 110-m hurdles (1952) in Olympic history—that plus golds both years in the 4 × 100-m relay.

I trust these stories and words will have some value for each of you. I hope that we will all stand on the shoulders of giants to further advance our professional society and wood as a material for the betterment of mankind and to better our stewardship of our most important renewable natural resource.

Finally, some advice from an old friend:

Advice from a Tree

- Stand tall and proud
- Sink your roots into the earth
- Be content with your natural beauty
- Remember your roots
- Enjoy the view
- Go out on a limb

With that I thank you for your patient and kind attention and leave you with my sincere thanks for the honor you have given me. I leave us all to ponder Herb Fleischer’s (1975) words, which ring as true today as when first delivered in 1975:

“Will we in SWST be courageous enough and wise enough to anticipate the assignments that lie ahead for us and to organize ourselves for them in a positive and constructive fashion? Are we preparing to assume responsibility as materials scientists of the future, who know how wood can best serve the needs of mankind in a world where all materials are scarce?”

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