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THE WINDS OF CHANGE

January 1 is, in one sense, just another date on the calendar. In a different sense, the beginning of a new year provides a convenient marker—it's a time to take stock, start new projects, and rethink old attitudes—to prepare for change.

When I think of change, I often consider my mother-in-law, who was born on an Oklahoma farm in 1905. The farm, although reasonably prosperous, had no electricity, no telephone, no running water, no mechanical farm equipment, no cars, no trucks. Cooking was done on a wood-burning stove.

Before she died at the age of 81, she was flying the friendly skies. She enjoyed the convenience of microwave cooking and modern communication systems. She lived to see her son farm from the comfort of an air-conditioned tractor and communicate from there by CB radio. And yet, in 1899, six years before she was born, Charles H. Duell, then Commissioner of the U.S. Office of Patents, said, "Everything that can be invented has been invented."

There are numerous, wonderful, similar quotes: In 1880 Thomas Edison said of his own invention, the phonograph, "It is not of any commercial value." Rutherford B. Hayes, President of the United States, participated in a trial telephone conversation between Washington and Philadelphia in 1887 and then said, "That's an amazing invention, but who would ever want to use one of them?"

As for computers, Thomas J. Watson, Chairman of IBM, said in 1943, "I think there is a world market for about five computers." Old stuff, you say? As recently as 1977, Ken

Olson, President of Digital Equipment Corporation, said: "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home."

If these highly intelligent and no doubt creative leaders were so unaware of the winds of change blowing about them, how can we ordinary folks hope to move effectively through the changes taking place around us?

For everyone in the forest products field today, there is no question that change is in the wind. The forestry and forest products scene is changing, in fact, on an almost daily basis. Many in our society are questioning the value of what we do, the way in which we do it, our values, our ethics, and even the value of our profession in a sustainable society. The atmosphere can be, at times, both threatening and exciting. But one thing is clear: change will be necessary if the forest products industry is to realize its full potential for contributing to society in the future.

Some of the reading I've done and the experiences I've had suggest several helpful techniques for thriving in periods of change:

- 1) First, we need to be open—to embrace new, better ways of doing things. We all tend to feel that we know what we are doing, that we have the benefit of tradition and experience, and that with respect to those things that relate to our profession, we know what is best. But the world is changing, and rapidly, and a great deal of thinking on the part of a great many people is taking place across the globe regarding how things might be done differently and better to accommodate change. We need, I believe, to be contin-

ually alert to the possibility that there is a better way. Might, for example, there be better ways to manage forests to produce the wood that is the basis for our profession? Could more attention be paid to environmental concerns in harvesting without drastic increases in delivered timber costs? Is it possible that a fundamental change in the way in which products are conceived, designed, produced, and marketed could markedly improve both market acceptance and performance of our products? Maybe so.

- 2) Second, we need to be *risktakers*—to learn how to take personal risks and to support *risktaking* in those around us. I recently participated in a lively discussion with a fellow wood scientist on the topic of risk. He subscribes to the view that when individuals and organizations are unwilling to take risks, a number of good ideas die right along with the bad ones. Based on this view, he believes that the people in a healthy, thriving organization should be able to point with pride to a number of things they've tried that didn't work. It seems to me that this observation applies to most of what we do and certainly to research and education.

In an environment in which assurances of success are increasingly sought before any work is done, in the corporate, aca-

demie, and governmental worlds alike, risk is increasingly difficult to accommodate. Nonetheless, conscious risk-taking is essential to meet the challenges of a changing world.

- 3) Third, we need to be in tune with the forces around us that are driving change. This means thinking beyond the scope of our everyday activities, carefully listening to the ideas of other people, considering ways to use our talents to help address societal problems, appropriately adding our voices to discussions of controversial issues, and acting decisively once it is clear what actions are needed.

What we do as scientists, technologists, engineers, and educators in the wood science field has important implications for the global environment as well as for the world's ability adequately to shelter growing populations. For our profession to remain the vital force that it requires that we who are part of it remain open to new ideas, be prepared to take risks, and anticipate change and actively apply our talents to help solve the societal problems that change will bring.

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