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In accepting the Society's Distinguished Service Award, I want to thank my friends in SWST and at Mississippi State University who, in truth, did most of the work for which I am today receiving credit. They are responsible for my presence here this morning. This award has a special meaning to me for a number of reasons, foremost among which is that, although I hold membership and have been active in several professional and technical associations, I have always considered SWST to be my professional home. Thank you for honoring me in this manner.

My comments will be brief and will be on the subject of communication. A psychologist would have a field day with the selection of that topic because it clearly supports the view that some people are attracted to subject matter areas in which they have a demonstrable weakness. My colleagues at Mississippi State would likely concur. What prompts me to choose this topic is the conviction based on many painful lessons that success in virtually all endeavors is closely associated with good communication and failure to a lack of communication. I would have learned that lesson at a much younger age if I had listened to my twelfth grade English literature teacher. She had a powerful voice, a commanding presence, and an unfaltering faith that—with the proper use of the English language—one could communicate with anyone on any subject. Two framed quotations were prominently displayed on her desk: "The ability to com-

municate accounts for man's ascent to the position he now occupies among Earth's creatures"; and "Communication is the foundation of civilization as we know it today."

If communication is the hallmark of man, then a lack of communication is assuredly his nemesis. Modern-day Towers of Babel are all too common and are responsible for confusion and misunderstanding among individuals and discord and wars among nations. Just as communication is important to society in general, it is also important in professional associations such as this one; for in the final analysis, such associations were founded for the specific purpose to encourage and promote communication among their members and between the associations and the public at large. In this regard, SWST has made significant progress during its relatively short history. Evidence of this progress is provided by *Wood and Fiber Science*, a journal of high quality that is recognized as such worldwide. Indeed, one could reasonably call our progress outstanding, considering the Society's small membership and the attendant budgetary constraints under which it operates.

This aspect of our professional communication, the printed word, is the most visible and also the most demanding of resources. Clearly, it fulfills in part the obligation that the Society has to foster communication. It is not necessarily the most important in terms of the immediate concerns of the profession. Our most important challenge, in my opinion, is to establish and maintain effective communication with several groups outside the profession. Among these, the one that is arguably the most important to SWST and the profes-

¹ As the recipient of this year's Distinguished Service Award, Warren Thompson delivered these remarks at the SWST Annual Meeting in Vancouver, BC. in June.

sion is prospective students. We have discussed and analyzed the problem of low student enrollment for many years; however, the essential facts are these:

1. The graduation annually of a cadre of capable young men and women in numbers sufficient to fill the employment positions available in forest products and related fields is of fundamental importance to the viability of the profession of wood science and technology.
2. Graduation rates have historically been inadequate to fill the demands of industry and other employers. This imbalance has resulted in positions for which our graduates are uniquely qualified being filled from outside the profession. Results of a study published by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the early 1980s suggest that there is a point in the supply-demand imbalance beyond which a profession simply ceases to exist.
3. High-cost, low-enrollment programs attract the attention of university administrators. The result is that we have fewer wood science and forest products teaching programs today than we had ten years ago.

We simply have not communicated effectively with the young people who ordinarily should be attracted to a field with excellent job opportunities and a competitive pay scale. I make that statement with a deep sense of personal frustration because very few of the undergraduate students that we enrolled in wood science and technology at Mississippi State University during my watch were attracted to our program by our extensive and quite costly recruiting efforts. That outcome is not unique to Mississippi State. Many of us have become experts in communication methods that simply have not worked. However, it is imperative that we find a way to communicate effectively with prospective students. In the final analysis, nothing else really matters if we are unable to achieve and maintain a graduation rate that is reasonably consistent both with the job market

and the requirements of our respective universities.

Among other groups with whom communication needs to be strengthened, the forest products industry itself must be assigned a high priority. The companies that comprise this industry are among the primary beneficiaries of both our teaching and research programs. At the local level, they employ our graduates, serve on our advisory committees, and otherwise provide support in a number of ways. At the national level, however, the visibility of the profession and our university-based programs needs a great deal of attention.

As a matter of principle, it is simply unacceptable for this profession to have reason, as I believe we do, to question the quality of our relationship with the leaders of the industry with whom we identify most closely. Beyond that, there are pragmatic reasons why we should seek to enhance communication with the corporate headquarters and national offices of forest products companies and organizations. The potential benefits that can accrue from a supportive relationship between university-based programs and the movers and shakers in the forest products industry are enormous. Who can doubt but that such a relationship, properly cultivated and directed, would have a salutary effect on both our undergraduate enrollment and research funding. The American Forest and Paper Association is one of several logical focal points of any efforts in this regard. The organizational structure of AFPA and the relationship that already exists between it and our schools and colleges through the National Association of Professional Forestry Schools and Colleges (NAPFSC) provide an opportunity to establish contacts. We have a very good story to tell. What is needed is the proper audience.

Finally, our most daunting challenge, one we share with several other natural resource professions, is communicating with the public on the environmental issues that impinge upon the growing, harvesting, and processing of the timber resource. The controversy surrounding these issues has effectively divided the various

groups into different camps that seem unable to communicate with each other. What we have here is a modern-day Tower of Babel of near Biblical proportions. The difficulty in resolving the issues involved is exacerbated by a witches' brew of politics, emotions, vested interest, and incomplete or unreliable data. SWST has a stake in the resolution of these issues from two perspectives: what is environmentally responsible; and what level of raw material supply is consistent with good forestry practices and market demands. These two perspectives are not inherently incompatible. Nevertheless, they largely define the sideboards of the present controversy and are the focal points in the communication campaigns to influence public opinion.

Does a small organization such as SWST have a role to play in this arena? I believe that

it does. It should do whatever it can to promote science-based environmental policies that address the legitimate environmental and economic interest of this country. I would encourage the SWST Board to examine the options that we have to contribute to this outcome. The preparation and distribution of position statements on those environmental issues that impinge upon our basic interests constitute one such option. There are others. However, remaining silent on matters that conflict with our professional knowledge and values is not one of them.

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