

WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 34

JULY 2002

NUMBER 3

MUSINGS ABOUT MISSION

Vision and mission statements are big in the United States. Everyone from General Motors to Little League baseball has vision statements, mission statements, published philosophies, core values, and statements of purpose. For several years, one of the topics at SWST Board meetings has been the development of vision and mission statements to present to the membership of the Society for approval. The statements that have been brought up for discussion have been as broad as the Society's membership. A vision statement is fairly easy to develop, but the Board has filled wastebaskets with mission statements that were not good enough.

Vision statements are easy because they are supposed to be sweeping and broad; mission statements are not. The mission statement should arise from our core competencies and should focus on who we are and what we do as a Society. It should also outline what the Society does for its membership. To that end, I would like to offer some thoughts about our mission and our purposes.

First, the Society, through criteria developed by its membership, has defined the profession. The answer to the question "what is a wood scientist or technologist?" is straightforward. A professional wood scientist or technologist is someone who has achieved a demonstrable level of learning about a particular subject area and has sufficient competence to correctly apply that knowledge. By adopting membership criteria and accreditation standards, the Society has defined the expected core of knowledge that constitutes a wood scientist or technologist. Wood Science and Technology, like medicine, chemistry, and farming, has developed and evolved. We have a nucleus of information related to the scientific and engineering properties of wood and wood-based materials, we have developed an understanding of the sometimes-complex processes used to manufacture products, and we have developed ways of understanding and dealing with the complexity and variability of a fascinating natural material. Over

time, we have broadened our study to include scientific management and marketing issues, composite materials, and we have focused our talents on environmental concerns. The body of knowledge that we have developed or adopted has broadened and deepened. I have no doubt we will continue to evolve as our knowledge base expands.

Second, the members of the Society develop, and the Society delivers, scientific information that relates to wood. The Executive Board, who are all Society members, sets the editorial policy; but it is the membership, through peer reviews, that makes decisions about the quality and appropriateness of submitted manuscripts for publication. The system has worked well to date. *Wood and Fiber Science* ranks among the top journals of its type in the world, and it continues to be a leading source of reliable scientific information.

Finally, the Society develops position statements relating to topics important to the membership. The legal documents that incorporated the Society allow some latitude with respect to lobbying, developing position papers, and making statements that support our common interests. Over time, we have developed several position statements, have advocated certain positions with the media, and members have been actively involved in debate.

Mission statements, by definition, are prelude to strategies that define the purpose of an organization, assess and build on the organization's core competencies, establish goals important to the membership, and position the Society for a leadership role that coincides with our purpose. While it has taken years to develop a formal mission statement, we have been acting in accord with our mission and serving our membership for decades.

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