



## Research Corner

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# We Can't Please All of the People, All of the Time

It has been more than a year since this column appeared in the pages of *Plating and Surface Finishing*, and an odd thing happened on the way to this one. Somehow, I found myself appointed chair of the AESF Research Board. While it is a distinct honor, I have also found that those who have preceded me have had a plate full, and I now appreciate their works even more than I had previously.

One thing that I have heard, either constructively or destructively, is that the projects that we are funding, to paraphrase, "have absolutely no meaning to me or my business." Usually, it's phrased much stronger than that. While I respectfully disagree, given recent successes in projects on wastewater reduction technology at Wayne State University and an increased understanding of the corrosion of zinc alloy plates for fasteners at Penn State University, I'd say part of the problem is "point-of-view."

### Providing a Link Between

#### Shop Management & Academia

Back in the days when decorative chromium was dripping off cars, and later, when the electronics industry developed the miracles of printed circuitry, the corporate research labs worked hand-in-hand with their in-house plating departments and the chemical suppliers. The research projects sponsored by the then-AES were relevant to the makeup of the Society because the focus was there. Today, if it exists at all, the corporate research lab is a shadow of its former

self. The plating is done by a secondary or tertiary supplier and the chemical suppliers find their marketing strategies radically altered. This has affected the makeup of the AESF, widening the range of interest, perspective and "point-of-view." The end result is that it is harder to please everyone.

This diversity puts more distance between many members and the end result of research, but I strongly believe the relevance is there. I was convinced of that when our project at Wayne State found itself being conducted in the venue of one of the better plating shops in the Detroit area. Shop management and academia working together was something special.

At the same time, our projects are only as good as the ideas that are sent to us. Virtually every project proposal that comes our way originates from the prospective researcher. That researcher may or may not be fully aware of our industry's problems and needs. More likely than not, there is a gap, unless that person has really done his or her homework. It is very rare that a professor has set foot in a plating shop, let alone talked with a plater. The Research Board can provide that important link.

However, the Research Board needs the input of the membership. It is one thing to say that the projects we sponsor are not relevant, but we rarely hear suggestions as to what the members want. If you have an idea, for Heaven's sake, write it up and send it to us. We can send out a

request for proposal saying, "This is what we're looking for. Can you do it?" So I urge you to send us your ideas.

### Reaping the Benefits of Research

I would also point out that the research results are not the only thing that we get out of this. The students who benefit from working on the research projects are the seeds of the technical future of our industry. In the projects that I have helped supervise over the years, I have seen many individuals graduate and go on to make further contributions as engineers, scientists and professors. Though many may disagree with me, I feel this benefit is as primary as the benefit derived from the research itself. So anyone contributing as an AESF Sponsor, Patron or Associate is actually providing multiple benefits for all of us. Consider it long and hard, if you're not contributing already. (You knew I was going to get around to the "money" part eventually, didn't you?)

By the way, another funny thing happened to me on the way to this column. I went into a restaurant for a Christmas breakfast while in my hometown for the holidays. After looking over the menu, I said, "I'll just have the eggs Benedict." My order soon came and it was served on a big shiny hubcap. I asked the waiter, "What's with the hubcap?" The waiter sang out, "There's no plate like chrome for the hollandaise."

With that, I had better sign off while I still can. P&SF