

# Perspective...



## The Responsibility of Chemists

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**O**NE OF THE MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES of American teachers of chemistry today is to seek ways of improving the teaching of the elementary students in chemistry both at the high school and college level. Teachers must regain the salesmanship quality so as to create an interest in chemistry and inspire the students to devote the hours needed to master the subject and at the same time to find it a pleasure and not a frustrating experience. . . .

It is a responsibility of the teacher to instill in the younger chemist enough self-confidence and ambition to succeed so that he will not hesitate to take a chance in order to improve his lot in the world. Research is, always has been, and always will be speculative to be true research. I recall reading in an editorial in *Chemistry and Industry* several years ago a statement by one of our British colleagues who said: "Chemical research is not like the gum machine where you put in your penny and get a stick of gum. It is like the fruit machine in which you insert many coins and sometimes you may hit the jackpot." I am sure that in sound research the returns from an investment will always be greater than from a "fruit machine," yet there is always an element of risk which must be properly evaluated.

Chemists must be willing to devote some effort to assure that the economic system in America provides an adequate reward for the individual or company which takes the risks involved in research and is

successful in creating new ideas or new industrial items which contribute to a higher standard of living. I believe that a monetary reward is not the only one a chemist seeks, but it is necessary that he receive compensation adequate for him to maintain his standing and self-respect in his community. Starting salaries of chemists have had a steady and rapid increase without adjustment of salaries for those who have been on the job for several years. This narrowing of salary levels between beginners and the men with years of experience must in some manner be adjusted so that opportunity for a lifetime of research may become more attractive. It would be unfortunate to lose too many good scientists to sales, production, or even management if it can be avoided. . . .

Chemists today must take the responsibility of seeing that they are replaced by an equally enthusiastic group from the newer generation of chemists of a quality which will command the respect of all. Chemists must make the American public more conscious of their profession and make it feel that theirs is a profession second to none. The chemical industry has reached a top echelon among the industries of this country. Chemists have made life of man safer, longer, and more comfortable. During the next generation progress will be equally great if the same effort is made as has been made in the past. (*Excerpts from the Priestley Medal Address before the 129th meeting, AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY, Dallas, Tex., April 9, 1956*)