

# Editorial

## The selfish wail against change

I suppose it is difficult to put oneself in the position of those who are faced with losing their livelihood. But if it ever happens that the dental profession makes itself obsolete and I am faced with unemployment, I hope that I will have the foresight and the courage to train myself for something new. At the least I hope I won't wail like a spoiled 2-year-old, as we have seen loggers and tobacco farmers reacting recently. The blacksmith and the candlestick maker have seen deep cuts in employment possibilities over the years. So it will be with some of the other professions and trades with which we are familiar—maybe even dentistry one day.

Why should we think otherwise? Why should we feel that simply because we train in a certain trade or profession we are guaranteed employment for life? After all, isn't learning a new line of work a rather attractive, exciting, and certainly challenging prospect?

The logging industry and the inexorable and inescapable demands of urban life have systematically cleared this land of old growth forest over generations. It is estimated that when the Pilgrims landed, there were 850 million acres of old growth forest in the United States. Now, some claim there are less than 3.5 million acres, and many loggers want to continue clear-cutting our forests. This issue has come to the public attention thanks to a small bird, the northern spotted owl, which lives only in the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest and is in danger of extinction due to loss of habitat. Do the loggers care? No. Many of them would shortsightedly, narrow-mindedly, and selfishly condemn their children and grandchildren to a life without the spotted owl so they can continue clear-cutting the nation's heritage, the forests that belong to all Americans and to all citizens of the world.

"Our livelihood depends on it," they whine. And the spotted owl dies. To heck with the Endangered Species Act," loggers say, "we have a right to make a living [yes you do] by cutting down the forests [no you don't]." That's like a prosthodontist preparing a patient's healthy teeth for crowns because that is what the dentist has been trained to do. The fact that the patient does not need crowns becomes irrelevant—it's the dentist's right because this is his or her live-

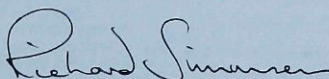
lihood. "Ridiculous," you would say, "that would never happen." But it could. The loggers and the tobacco farmers are acting analogously.

The tobacco farmers are seeing their livelihoods threatened by the national trend against smoking. At last it seems that the scientific evidence is strong enough that smokers, at least in the United States, are finding it inconvenient to smoke. Legislation prevents them from causing harm to others with their second-hand smoke. So the tobacco farmers of the southern states are wailing and bleating that their livelihood is threatened. Apparently, even exporting huge amounts of poison in the form of cigarettes to the Third World cannot guarantee the future employment of all tobacco farmers.

Now, tobacco farmers and loggers are not bad people. They don't *want* to hurt anyone or render any species extinct. They are very normal people who are reacting to change as too many of us do. They are scared. Would dentists not be equally scared if the profession of dentistry were similarly threatened? I suppose many would. But I would hope that many others would be able to move on. Many of our colleagues whose dental schools have closed in the past few years have had to make significant changes, either in geographical location or in switching from teaching and research back to dental practice. We should expect this sort of change, and look forward to it as a welcome challenge, rather than resist the irresistible force that is change.

As the needs and demands of society shift, so must we all be willing to change even if it means something as seemingly sacrosanct as our vocation. Change, after all, is part of the natural order of life. What greater excitement and challenge can there be than to explore one's personal talents by training for something new?

Wailing won't do it—learning will.



Richard J. Simonsen  
Editor-in-Chief