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Editorial



Just Do It

Twenty years ago last August, Nike's advertising slogan "Just Do It" hit the airwaves. Before long, that simple three-word phrase was inspiring athletes and non-athletes alike. It won numerous awards and recognitions — it was inducted into the Advertising Slogan Hall of Fame, and ranked second on *Advertising Age's* list of the Top Ten Advertising Slogans of the Century (behind DeBeers' "Diamonds are forever"), among others.

A few years earlier, I heard Rear Admiral Grace Murray Hopper speak at the opening breakfast of the 1986 Society of Women Engineers National Convention in Hartford, CT, where she offered this advice: When you have strong convictions in your ideas and are confident that you are correct, "it's easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission."

Both of those phrases resonated with me the first time I heard them. And they continue to shape the way I try to live my life. (Although I admit that "just do it" sometimes just doesn't do it for me and procrastination prevails, and I'm careful to never let the forgiveness/permission line slip around my children.)

When senior editor Joanna Ziemlewski and I were speaking with David DiBiasio, head of WPI's chemical engineering department, about his Commentary article in this issue (p. 4), he expressed frustration that although various studies and reports on reforming the chemical engineering curriculum have made many good recommendations, the pace of change has been slow. Before the words could pass my lips, he beat me to the punch, saying that it's now time to stop studying the question and "just do it."

Indeed, many universities are already doing it — reforming their chemical engineering curricula — in a variety of ways. Joanna attended some of the sessions on education that were held at the AIChE Annual Meeting in November, and in her Update article (pp. 6–9) she reports on a few of the innovative programs that were discussed. For example: S. Ganeshan, an adjunct professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, advocates going back to the basics at the undergraduate level; Tim Raymond and Michael Hanyak at Bucknell Univ. and Paul Sides at Carnegie Mellon Univ. are using problem-based learning approaches; at WPI, Anthony Dixon has incorporated the COMSOL software package into a course on mathematical modeling; and Laureano Jiménez, of the Univ. Rovira i Virgili in Spain, teams first-year students in an integrated design project with fourth-year students, enabling them all to develop soft skills such as teamwork, leadership and communications.

DiBiasio suggests another way to help chemical engineering students learn about themselves, their place in the world, and how engineering, the professional world, and culture interact: "we must get them off-campus, preferably out of the U.S., in pre-professional learning experiences." He also suggests a variety of ways for chemical engineers working in industry and the companies that employ them to get involved in such efforts.

Many good proposals have been put forth, and many professors have implemented innovative approaches. Universities should give instructors permission to try out their own good ideas, and to share their success (and non-success) stories at AIChE meetings. Industry can provide various types of support, including some that are relatively low-cost. There are even things we as individual chemical engineers can contribute to the education of our future colleagues. Let's not procrastinate while we wait for permission — we'll rarely need to ask for forgiveness.

Cynthia F. Mascone
Editor-in-Chief