



Published by:

The Electrochemical Society (ECS)
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Canada Post:

Publications Mail Agreement #40612608
Canada Returns to be sent to:
Pitney Bowes International, P.O. Box 25542,
London, ON N6C 6B2

ISSN

Print: 1064-8208
Online: 1944-8783

The Electrochemical Society *Interface* is published quarterly by The Electrochemical Society (ECS), at 65 South Main Street, Pennington, NJ 08534-2839 USA. Subscription to members as part of membership service; subscription to nonmembers is available; see the ECS website. Single copies \$9.00 to members; \$17.00 to nonmembers. © Copyright 2011 by The Electrochemical Society. Periodicals postage paid at Pennington, New Jersey, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Electrochemical Society, 65 South Main Street, Pennington, NJ 08534-2839.

The Electrochemical Society is an educational, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with more than 8000 scientists and engineers in over 70 countries worldwide who hold individual membership. Founded in 1902, the Society has a long tradition in advancing the theory and practice of electrochemical and solid-state science by dissemination of information through its publications and international meetings.



What Do We Do?

I am sure that most of you, outside of your professional life, run into a wide spectrum of people drawn from very different walks of life. How often do we try and communicate the essence of what we do career-wise to a person completely unconnected from our business? Surely, professionals like doctors, lawyers, and even engineers and people in the business world have an easier task in this regard than people engaged in R&D. I was prompted to address this topic in this column partly from the experience of teaching a course this semester on “Chemistry for Non-Science Majors.” The task I have in this course of attempting to highlight the important role that chemistry plays in our daily living is not unlike the challenges involved in communicating to a lay audience what I do as a “materials research and/or solid-state electrochemist.” Of course it becomes much easier when I simply say instead that I study “alternative or renewable energy;” I suppose this is because the audience gets it on the practical importance of this particular research topic. Indeed communications professionals advise against using a label (or an implementation process) when explaining one’s profession (unless, of course, you happen to be a lawyer or a doctor!). The late Steve Jobs was a masterful communicator and I suppose we can all gain a tip or two by watching past clips of him launching an Apple product.

Extrapolating this communication idea to The Electrochemical Society as a whole, a *Gedankenexperiment* (or thought experiment) can be done. Suppose we had the power to null out all the technological contributions that have emanated from the membership that constitute the various “wet” and “dry” Divisions of the Society. Life as we know it would be far different without advanced materials (including displays, monitors, and lighting sources), batteries, computers and communication devices, sensors etc. In fact, this “technology time machine” would instantly transport us back to what essentially goes on as life in a very underdeveloped part of the world that is also isolated in all respects. Our lifespan would even shrink because of the lack of cardiac stents and pacemakers. In this light, the practical importance of what the Society members do in their professional life immediately takes on new meaning and significance. By the same token and given the current economic climate, it is also all the more incumbent on us, as a community, to convey the important message to the policy makers that funding cutbacks in the R&D sector would not be prudent. This surely applies to R&D in both the private and public sectors. It can also be argued that, in an economic downturn, education and R&D assume even more importance as investments for the future that should not be curtailed.

Finally, the recently concluded fall meeting of the Society in Boston broke attendance records for a North American meeting. Was it the location? Or was it because of the first Electrochemical Energy Summit? Notwithstanding the underpinning factors in the success of this meeting, clearly the message did resonate to the science and engineering communities at large that this was a forum worth attending. And the meeting was a success in an economic climate when travel budgets are being slashed. We must continue to fine-tune the art of communicating the essence of what we do, both on an individual basis and as a Society so that everyone benefits. Stay tuned.

Raj K.

Krishnan Rajeshwar
Editor



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