

P. Aarne Vesilind's Commentary on "The Incomplete Technical Presentation"

Commentary On
The Incomplete Technical Presentation

The two questions raised by this scenario are: 1) Should nontechnical (marketing) people be welcomed at a theoretically oriented conference? and 2) Should the problems with the particle analyzer be made public?

Having attended many technical conferences where salespeople make up the majority of the audience, I sympathize with the author's concerns. The problem is not with the salespeople, however, but with the conference organizers. If they are not careful in screening out patently commercial papers, they have no right to complain. A paper that describes the function and performance of a commercial product certainly would not be considered a theoretical paper. The papers probably were well-received by the marketing people like Peter, but the very inclusion of William and Katherine's paper on the program precluded the conference from being a theoretical conference.

The second problem relates to the answer that William ought to give to the professor's question. There is no doubt that he should not lie or withhold information. But there are ways of presenting the facts that will not damage the future of the product or the company. William could say, for example, that the particle counter is not designed to operate in the overlapping size ranges because the response curves are not linear and the ends of the curves can be expected to deviate, thus giving false readings. He could repeat that the particle counter has been shown to have excellent precision and accuracy if used as recommended by the manufacturer. That is, the device should be used within the three ranges; its applicability should not be pushed into the overlapping ranges. This response would have been honest and forthright (and would have saved his skin).