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/THE FIRST WORD

So, We Have Survived Again

A

t the end of *The Seven Samurai*, the three remaining warriors slump over their swords in a pelting rain, ankle-deep in the mud of the village they have defended against a small army of brigands. They have spent blood defending not a great lord but a ragged, hapless peasant hamlet. The trio's grizzled leader—the melancholy veteran of a hundred lost battles, facing both victory and the loss of most of his companions—turns to the others and observes blandly, "So, we have survived again."

So, we have survived again. The magazine business is like that, especially at deadline ("deadline," is such a menacing word). Challenges spring up so quickly, and from so many different directions: news breaks as we're putting the book to bed; late ads, late stories, late type, and suddenly amnesiac computers force us to take the magazine apart and put it back together. Over ten years, companies, coworkers, and competitors have come and gone. So have some personal enthusiasms (though they mostly come and seldom go)—polymerase chain reaction, perfusion bioreactors, two-dimensional electrophoresis, the human genome project, peptidomimetics, mitochondrial disease, telomere function. Artificial life.

Grace Paley once titled a book of short stories *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. That about sums it up. For 120 months now, we have survived again—and again. Survived the law's delay, the insolence of office, the spurns that patient merit of th' unworthy takes. Survived a surprising number of publications that came on wanting to be the *Business Week*, *The Economist*, *People*, or *Der Spiegel* of biotechnology. Most vanished as suddenly as they appeared.

Through it all, we have tried to be the biotechnology magazine of biotechnology. After all, small 'b' biotechnology has its power in the laboratory. Once a product has emerged from the lab, the market doesn't care how it was produced; the market cares how it performs. Biotechnology can help with that, obviously, but it is no guarantor. Unless a new company is intent on life as a molecular biology research boutique, it had better start thinking of itself as a pharmaceutical company, a crop-seed company, an agrichemical company, if it wants to survive. If you're in business making a product, you damn well better focus on the customer: industries are defined by their customers—what they need and how they're reached—not by the tools used in R&D.

That hasn't always been clear. A decade ago, "biotechnology" was a tradename Wall Street used to sell start-up dreams to starry-eyed investors. Does that sound far-fetched? Consider: when we launched *Bio/Technology*, we had to license the name—from E.F. Hutton.

What too few people understood then—it's better, though by no means universally, appreciated now—is that biotechnology is the name of a process, not a product. Nobody makes and sells a "biotechnology." The semi-conductor industry makes semi-conductors. The computer industry makes computers. The chemical industry, chemicals. And so it goes: The drug industry makes drugs. The agricultural industry produces crops. Biotechnology is short-hand for molecular-biology-supported research, development, and production. A well-defined and vital process, but one had as well speak of "an R&D industry" as a biotechnology industry—unless, of course, one intends to speak disingenuously of an industry whose product is biotechnology companies intended for consumption by national and multinational drug and agricultural giants.

We have tried, then, to keep *Bio/Technology* focused on the tools of process and product development. Technology is our meat and drink, but not the whole cuisine: One must be able to understand the financial, social, political, regulatory, and market forces that shape the world into which that biotechnology-derived product must be sold.

The ride has been fun this far, as several of the articles in this month's special 10th anniversary supplement make clear. But the real thrills are yet to come.

—DOUGLAS K. MCCORMICK