

# Current Comments®

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## Bonnie Lawlor's Silver Anniversary at ISI®—A Tribute

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### Introduction

I once characterized the Institute for Scientific Information® (ISI®) by saying it "is *people*—not paper, systems, and machines. There isn't time every day to acknowledge what each person does separately nor what we all accomplish together, but there are days when one should make the effort."<sup>1</sup> Today is one of those days.

In 1967, 25 years ago, Helen Anne Lawlor began her career at ISI. She started as an indexer for *Index Chemicus*®. Today she is executive vice president of database publishing and is responsible for the development, production, and marketing of ISI's varied products and services.

Helen Lawlor has always been known to me and her friends and colleagues as Bonnie. The choice of name reflects her unassuming style which, in part, explains how she has earned the respect not only of colleagues at ISI, but also of research scientists and information professionals around the world. Her diplomatic skills are well known because she communicates and convinces without offending. These are important qualities for someone who holds herself and her staff to high standards.

To say Bonnie is hardworking and energetic is an understatement. However, the most appropriate and succinct term that describes her abilities is *implementer*—she gets things done. Bonnie is hesitant to make uninformed decisions. But once all the data are in, Bonnie is quick to act. ISI's products and services involve a mass of details so it requires dedicated commitment, tempered with humor, to make an outstanding executive. To borrow a phrase that is over-used today, she is a wonderful role model.



Neil Benson

Bonnie Lawlor

### From Indexer to Executive

When Bonnie first came to ISI in 1967 after reading an ad in the Philadelphia *Bulletin* newspaper, she joined a company which then had 150 full-time employees. ISI was located at that time in an office building on Chestnut Street near Independence Hall. In 1979, ISI moved to its present building on Market Street. We now employ over 600 people, including those at our facilities in Cherry Hill, New Jersey; Uxbridge, England; and Limerick, Ireland. About half of these employees report to Bonnie through several vice presidents. When discussing these numbers, Bonnie points out that it was once possible to know every employee by name, a boast we haven't been able to make for some time.

The year Bonnie joined ISI<sup>®</sup>, we celebrated the 200th consecutive issue of *Index Chemicus*<sup>®</sup>, our now weekly chemical information publication, then in its eighth year of publication.<sup>2</sup> During those years, we had identified and indexed over 800,000 new chemical compounds. We were just about to announce our plans for a new magnetic tape service that would make substructure searching practical both by computer and manual methods.

Bonnie's first job at ISI involved indexing and abstracting new chemical compounds and reactions described in the journal literature. She later edited copy for *Index Chemicus*. ISI employees who knew Bonnie in her first years here remember her as an extremely shy young woman, especially around upper management. Nevertheless, her talents and dedication were soon recognized and rewarded. During the decade Bonnie worked in ISI's Chemical Information Division, she rose from indexer to supervisor, group manager, assistant director, and director, the division's highest position.

This was a period of rapid and sometimes painful growth. Information technology was changing very fast, demand for graphics capabilities was increasing, and the market for chemical information products was becoming even more competitive. In 1979, *Current Chemical Reactions*<sup>®</sup> was introduced, placing still greater demands on a small staff. During this time, Bonnie worked on Wiswesser Line Notation (WLN)<sup>3</sup> with Charlie Granito, an ISI alumnus who is now president of International Products Corporation. WLN is a linear alphanumeric notation system which unambiguously describes the structure of a chemical compound.<sup>4</sup> In its time, it was the most widely used of many competing notation systems. Bonnie played an active role in the Chemical Notation Association, a governing body that guided the development of encoding rules for WLN, working on various committees and serving as president in 1980.

In 1982, Bonnie became vice president of production operations for the entire company. Within a year, she assumed even more responsibilities. Appointed vice presi-

dent and general manager of ISI's Index Products Division in 1983, she headed a newly created profit center for the creation, development, production, sales, and marketing of ISI's index products and chemical information products.

During this period, Bonnie also took an important step toward rounding out her development as a top-notch executive by enrolling in the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania under ISI's sponsorship. She participated in an intensive two-year Wharton Executive MBA Program in which selected executives meet two days each week and for several week-long periods. Bonnie continued to work full-time at ISI throughout the program. She deserves a lot of credit for the dedication required to complete this intensive study without sacrificing the performance of her demanding ISI duties. Bonnie continues her involvement at Wharton as a member of the alumni board.

Formal business and management training at Wharton complemented Bonnie's talents and experience while enhancing her skills. Combined with her scientific training and background, this gives her—and ISI—a critical edge in an increasingly competitive industry. An ISI colleague recently described Bonnie succinctly by saying, "She's small, but she thinks tall." Bonnie demonstrates the flexibility needed to accept change and the leadership to help others accept it.

### Serving the Profession

Before coming to ISI, Bonnie earned degrees in chemistry from Chestnut Hill College (BS) and St. Joseph's College (MS), both in Philadelphia, where she was born and raised. Like thousands of scientists who were trained for a traditional laboratory career, Bonnie became an information scientist by chance. Today she is frequently invited to speak about nontraditional alternative careers for scientists. She welcomes the opportunity to share her experiences and mentor younger scientists. Not surprisingly, she has participated in the National Science Foundation's visiting women sci-

entists program promoting science careers for women.

At ISI<sup>®</sup>, we have always encouraged employees to recognize their responsibility to serve our profession as well as our company. In Bonnie's case, she claims that our encouragement was closer to force-feeding when it came to presenting papers at professional meetings. Listening today to this confident and polished executive, it is difficult to believe that she was afraid of me then. It's easier to believe her when she says she once mistook me for the janitor.

But, however it happened, early in her career she became involved and has been an active professional ever since, especially in the American Chemical Society (ACS). Bonnie currently serves as a councilor for the ACS division of chemical information (CINF) and chairs the CINF publications committee. At various times over the past 15 years, she has also chaired CINF, served as its secretary, chaired the nominations and publications committees, and served on long-range planning, program, and membership committees. She has also edited the *Chemical Information Bulletin*. Bonnie currently chairs the ACS committee on copyright and serves on the ACS books advisory board. She is a founding member of the Philadelphia Chemical Information Group and a board member of the Chemical Structure Association Trust.

Though Bonnie's professional memberships and service have focused on her involvement in chemistry, she has branched out considerably in recent years. For example, she is a trustee of PALINET (Pennsylvania Library Network), has served on its finance and executive committees, and is the current secretary/treasurer. Bonnie is also a recent past president of the National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services (NFAIS) and currently chairs its information policy and copyright commit-

tee, where she has been active in representing the interests of database producers to the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is much in the news these days.<sup>5</sup>

Bonnie has authored several articles for NFAIS on the impact of technology on publishing and information distribution. Most recently, she discussed electronic document delivery.<sup>6</sup> She is also currently president-elect of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the American Society for Information Science.

## Conclusion

One of Bonnie's strengths is her ability to create a work environment and team atmosphere that make it possible to attain ISI's goals. She is responsible for developing and implementing strategic plans that, over the last five years, have enabled us to improve our existing products and offer new ones to meet the changing needs of our customers. Under her direction, we have improved production processes through increased computerization and the use of image scanning and laser printing technologies. The success of the electronic versions of ISI's citation indexes and *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> is due to a great extent to Bonnie's involvement.

Founding and operating your own company provides many rewards. Not the least of these is the pleasure of watching outstanding employees develop into mature professionals. In every sense, they become part of your extended family. Bonnie Lawlor is a prototype of the many people I've encountered at ISI, and if she credits me with contributing to her growth I am proud to acknowledge it. You've come a long way, baby, but you've only just begun!

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