



## Becoming Visible: Effective Self-Promotion

Being a young scientist yourself, you observe other young scientists and wonder how they were selected as the award winners, the symposium speakers, the review writers, the committee members, and Councilors of the Society. How did they become visible enough to be acknowledged and invited?

The answer has many different parts, but you can be sure that one aspect has been effective self-promotion.

The term self-promotion may evoke images of boorish, boastful, bombastic behaviors by scientists “more skilled in public relations than in research.”<sup>1</sup> However, self-promotion can simply entail effective networking to introduce oneself, and one’s work, to other scientists by a variety of means. After all, communication is the engine of scientific discovery. Peer-reviewed publication provides the credibility for the description of the science, but there are myriad other ways for communicating one’s work, ideas, and relationship to the scientific community as well.

One way to become better known is by receiving an award. Peer recognition for achievements and discoveries is not only gratifying, it is also noticed by others who might be in charge of your next promotion, or on the panel reviewing your next grant, or chairing a symposium organizing committee. Nominations for awards are often done with the goal of surprising the recipient, but far more often, the nominee is asked for materials in support of the nomination. “Given the unsupervised nature of much of what we do...I am really in the best position to describe ... my work most effectively.”<sup>2</sup>

### Invite Champions, Ask Questions

In some cases, a young scientist may learn about an award and ask a more senior scientist to champion her or his nomination, in which case putting together a package of materials facilitates the process for the nominator. Indeed,

many award selection committees actively recruit nominations from their colleagues to maximize consideration of all worthy candidates. It is a fact that if one is not nominated, one certainly will not be considered.

Although awards represent a good, if narrow, opportunity for effective self-promotion, good relationships, along with good science, provide the networks for sustained career development. In many training programs, students and postdoctoral fellows are provided the opportunity to meet with seminar speakers or even organize seminar series. Be active in these events so that you meet these invited scientists.

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### Simply Asking

One of the most difficult actions for a young scientist is simply asking a question in a department seminar or at a scientific meeting. Hearing one’s voice in a public forum can be terrifying at first. Candid senior scientists will note that if you missed a point, you can be sure that others did too. Nonetheless, if the forum context is initially too intimidating, speaking one-on-one with the speaker after the talk is a fine alternative. There will be interest in your question, in your ideas, and this positive reception may provide confidence for asking group questions in the next forum.

There is also a way for speakers to help. The seminar speaker can specifically call on people she or he does not know, or can encourage questions from the younger voices in the audience. Such graciousness from a more senior scientist can have a large impact.

### Understand Scientific Connection

No matter how good one’s science may be, there is always science that is better. Keeping in mind how one’s own science connects to the science of others and adds value to the field can provide confidence at meetings. That confidence is enough to start a conversation with a more senior or even a “famous” scientist. If others join

in, all the better, not only for your visibility but also for sharing and critiquing ideas. Everyone benefits. Being loud and obnoxious works against anyone. Communicating clearly and interacting personably are key.

Poster sessions also are an excellent venue for becoming visible. Presenting posters provides the opportunity to give interactive “miniseminars.” Senior scientists can again be positive participants here by listening to the description of the work and asking questions. The poster presenter will deeply appreciate this opportunity to interact and will also remember that visit. Going to the posters of other scientists is equally important since it provides practice in asking questions.

### Participate in Institutions, Societies

All of these actions are suitable for anyone developing a career, including those in their first independent positions. In addition, scientists should seek opportunities to participate on committees, not only in their place of employment, but also in their scientific societies. Such committee service provides an excellent opportunity for meeting others and for sharing ideas and work habits. This “self-promotion” works best if not premeditated. Communication and developing relation-

ships naturally provide visibility, and that visibility provides valuable networking just as the networking provides valuable visibility.

Effective self-promotion starts early and locally. The friends made in graduate school, both students and faculty, form the first network. These scientists can provide a valuable core of contacts throughout one’s career. Staying in touch with friends comes naturally, and science provides many opportunities for intersecting paths. Graduate school friends will distribute into multiple areas of science, and in future years they will be providers of the names of scientists they know for awards, symposium speakers, review writers, and Society Officers. Their networks and yours will intersect. From visibility comes influence, a voice in the science, and a platform for encouraging the visibility of the next generations of scientists who also will be wondering how people become known scientifically. ■

—Caroline Kane

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Nelkin, D. *Selling Science: How the Press Covers Science and Technology*. W. H. Freeman, 1987.
- <sup>2</sup> Lang, J. M. Shameless Self-Promotion. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50(3): C4, September 12, 2003.

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## WICB Selects Awardees, Plans Events

Recognition and career issues were the focus of the May 6 meeting of the Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Committee. The Committee met at the ASCB office in Bethesda, MD. In attendance were Chair Ursula Goodenough and members Alexandra Ainsztein, Elizabeth Blackburn, Caroline Kane, Laurie Littlepage, Manuela Martins-Green, Sandra Masur, Suzanne Pfeffer, Jean Schwarzbauer, Vivian Siegel, Phil Stahl, and Zena Werb. Also present were ASCB President Mary Beckerle, ASCB Executive Director Joan Goldberg, and ASCB Executive Assistant/Office Manager Cheryl Lehr.

The WICB Junior and Senior Awards were selected from the large pools of candidates nominated. The awards will be announced in the July issue of the *ASCB Newsletter*, pending notification of the award winners. This year, WICB is awarding a Special Citation for Advocacy for Women in Science; the recipient of the Citation will also be announced in the July *Newsletter*.

The Committee also discussed the Annual Career Lunch to be held on December 11, and added a new table discussion on “Career Opportunities in the Era of Extended Postdocs.” The WICB Evening Program will address “Creative Responses to the Current Funding Environment,” while the WICB Workshop will focus on “Developing Leadership Skills.”

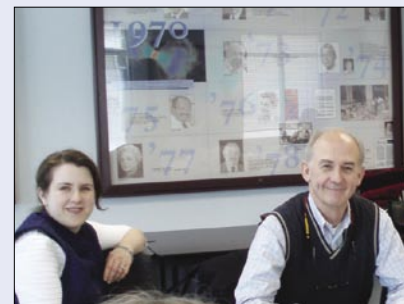
A “Role Model” online pictorial is in development to offer young scientists visual acknowledgment that science and family life can be combined. ■



Right to left: Mary Beckerle speaks to Alexandra Ainsztein, Zena Werb, Manuela Martins-Green, and Sandra Masur.



Left to right: WICB Chair Ursula Goodenough and ASCB Executive Director Joan Goldberg.



WICB Committee members Laurie Littlepage and Philip Stahl.