

Owning Your Own Career

Strategic thinking about your career—that is, thinking about the future years down the road—can be very difficult. Even as you finish your degree, or write your grant, or convince your supervisor about the merits of a research direction, you are usually looking just two to five years into the future. But what would you like to accomplish 10 years from now?

From the time we are students and as we move through the more advanced stages of our careers, we all wonder how to break in, move forward, or change what we are doing to align our goals more directly with our interests. If we wait for others to do this for us, it ain't gonna happen. Taking charge of our careers—owning our careers—is essential, and leads to rewarding outcomes.

Reluctant to Ask?

Speakers at workshop after workshop enjoin participants to be proactive in careers. Why are some people reluctant to use the networking and communication skills that are essential to career advancement? How do others develop the comfort to do this?

Networking has become a worn term, but it is in fact front and center in your efforts to plan your career. You will not get career advancement in science based on family ties as you might in business. You will get career advancement in science when people know about you from your accomplishments and from your champions who speak highly of you for particular positions.

What if you want to take a path no one has walked, or “walk a border” between interests? In the settings in which most cell biologists traditionally work, you will have opportunities to talk with academics and researchers in colleges, institutes, or hospitals. In addition to this comfortable circle, talk with people whose career paths pique your professional curiosity. Computer graphics? Public policy? Research that bridges science and education? Literature? No one will invite you to an informational interview. You need to invite professionals in other fields for coffee or lunch to pick their brains, solicit their opinions, and cultivate them

as contacts. You may be surprised at what you find.

Contact Map

People in your circle of acquaintances may very well be able to help your career move forward.



Caroline Kane

A contact map is the circle of people whom you know and also the circle of people whom THEY know. The “old boys’ network” is still a reality, but the old boys are not the only game in town. Networks work best when many people are involved, sharing their contacts.

A professional society such as ASCB is an excellent networking resource. An email or a tweet to another member with a query (in which you note that you too are an ASCB member) can connect you with resources and a broader circle of people than you might have imagined. WICB has both a blog (<http://tinyurl.com/qq8vp4>) and a Facebook page (<http://tinyurl.com/062v1k>) set up for just this kind of purpose (see <http://tinyurl.com/oj5m2o>). Take the initiative. ASCB is your society too!

Strut Your Stuff!

You are excited about what you have done and about what you want to do. So tell people—at scientific or even institutional meetings, at seminars, at dinners with seminar speakers, at social events, or during that five-hour coast-to-coast flight with an engaging aisle-mate. Raised to be humble about our accomplishments, many of us belittle those accomplishments. You do not have to be boastful, but you do need to make others aware of what you have contributed.

You shouldn't expect that others will lay a path to your door because of what they know you have done. How would those others know? Unexpected personal intersections may lead you to new areas that are well complemented by your scientific training, be it a new area of research for the lab or a new career trajectory altogether.

Take the Initiative!

There are many ways to make yourself and your accomplishments and your future goals



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known within and throughout your community of potential career colleagues. As a graduate student:

- Take a seminar speaker to lunch.
- Ask questions during or after a seminar.
- Interact with visiting sabbatical scientists.
- Talk with faculty from other departments whose academic arena interfaces with your interests.
- Talk with professionals in the region surrounding your campus.

As a postdoc, participate in your postdoctoral society, or start such a society to enable you and other postdocs to network with each other, with visiting scientists at your institution, and with professionals at large.

As a new scientist, be part of the fabric of your institution and community. Certainly use the common venues of scientific seminars and meetings, but step outside those venues as well, perhaps even taking classes in new areas. Every few years, ask yourself what you would like to be doing if your current career path were not

available to you as of tomorrow morning. How would you get to that other or additional career path? Does that sound appealing?

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Confidence

Confidence is the most important component of career advancement. Owning your own career requires that you put confidence on your shoulder and carry it with you.

At the end of the day, after all the mentoring and external influence, it's you who takes charge of your decisions about your future. You make the selections. Those selections are not unchangeable, not written in stone. All of us learn as we go. Many scientists have made dramatic changes in career direction. There are many ways to contribute to society once you are equipped with scientific training, but taking the chance to make a change can be scary and takes confidence. Go ahead and own it. Do what you do because that is what you choose. ■

—*Caroline Kane, for the Women in Cell Biology Committee*

Science Newshounds Wanted

The hottest discoveries and the coolest science are the quarry as the ASCB Public Information Committee (PIC) screens abstracts this August for *Cell Biology 2009*, the press book for journalists covering the ASCB Annual Meeting in December. PIC screening panels go through all 1,300 or more abstracts submitted for possible minisymposium presentation to run down the top-breaking science news stories. ASCB members with a nose for news and tireless eyeballs are welcome to volunteer as PIC Associates. The screening panels will work entirely online, from August 10–31.

PIC is also seeking PIC Associates to encourage social media interactions by blog, FaceBook, and/or Twitter at the meeting. Volunteers at the Annual Meeting can also help PIC with the Celldance Awards ceremony and CellSlam, the ASCB's juried, stand-up science slam. Contact PIC Chair Rex Chisholm (r-chisholm@northwestern.edu) or ASCB Science Writer John Fleischman (jfleischman@ascb.org) for details. ■

Did You Know...?

You still have time to vote for next year's ASCB President-Elect and four Council members.

- The President-Elect will serve as President in 2011 and Past President in 2012.
- The term of office for all positions is three years.
- This year the Council, as empowered by the ASCB Bylaws, has segmented the ballot to ensure continued minority representation on the Council. Two minority nominees are running against each other; *all* eligible voters (regular, postdoctoral, and emeritus members) are invited to vote for one of these nominees, along with three of the remaining six nominees.

The deadline to cast your ballot is **June 26**. Go to www.ascb.org to preview the ballot and/or cast your vote today! ■