



Dear Labby,

I love your column and hope you can help me. My supervisor is moving very slowly in publishing my data, and I badly need to publish.

I am an eighth-year postdoc, in the fifth year of my second postdoctoral position. My training has been at several reasonably good research institutions. However, my publication record is only OK. I have one first-author paper in a reasonable journal from my graduate work and two papers in good journals from my first postdoc (one as first author and the other as one of only three authors).

Unfortunately, I still do not have any publications from my current position. This is partly due to reaching dead ends in the research project that I started here. However, it is also partly due to my supervisor's inability or unwillingness to focus on my work. When I switched projects midway through my time here, my boss agreed to publish a minimal paper with the little bit of good data that I had generated. It has now been a year and a half since I first presented a complete manuscript draft to him.

We have submitted the paper twice to mid-tier journals without success. Based on the reviews that we received, I did a couple of additional key experiments that significantly strengthen the paper. I am now waiting, yet again, for my supervisor to find the time to focus on the manuscript. If his past behavior is any indication, it will be at least one or two more months before he gets around to it. In the meantime, the project that I switched to has proved difficult, and it is likely to take at least another year, and a good dose of luck, to generate enough data for a manuscript. In other words, the twice-reviewed manuscript is my only real publication possibility while I look for a permanent job.

My lack of publications, particularly from my current position, has effectively killed my research career. I am not very upset about this because I have discovered how much I love, and am good at, teaching. The problem is, even though publications do not receive as much attention at teaching-oriented institutions, they are still considered evidence of productivity. In addition, most teaching institutions still want their faculty to engage in research that could involve undergraduates. Again, my record looks unproductive. Everything else on my CV looks great.

I have asked, pleaded, and even nagged my boss to deal with my paper and send it out for review. It's not as if my boss doesn't also need the publication: He is a mid-career investigator with a small lab who has been criticized for not publishing enough. And yet, there my paper sits. Do you have any suggestions for how I should handle this situation, both in terms of dealing with my boss and in terms of my job search? Am I being unrealistic to expect my boss to handle this more quickly? Your perspective is appreciated.

—*Trying to Get Out*

## Labby Wants to Hear from You!

Direct your questions to [labby@ascb.org](mailto:labby@ascb.org). Authors of questions chosen for publication may indicate whether or not they wish to be identified. Submissions may be edited for space and style.

Dear Trying to Get Out,

Labby has had similar queries in the past, but yours is the most vexing. Five years in a total postdoctoral span of eight is a huge part of your formative career. Because this is your second postdoc, your lab head might have granted you some independence in recognition of your career stage and previous accomplishments. But his total indifference is mystifying. The fact that he is not well established makes the situation all the more puzzling. There are scientists who desperately want their lab members to fail. But this trait is quite rare (and is usually linked to a more serious underlying emotional or psychiatric disorder).

As discussed in a past column, postdoc associations can be an avenue for resolving issues with lab heads (see the April 2009 issue of the *ASCB Newsletter*). It is probably too late for your postdoc association to assist with the broader issues in your situation, but perhaps it could help with the very specific matter of getting your boss to submit—or agree to allow you to submit—your finished manuscript. If necessary, you could appeal to your department chair and/or dean.

Your zeal for teaching is the obvious silver (or maybe gold or even platinum) lining of this dark cloud. You are right that many teaching-intensive institutions want to see research accomplishments. (And the best want to see some research going forward. There are some top scientists at small teaching institutions.) Labby would advise you to emphasize the research from your graduate work and first postdoc when applying for jobs. Perhaps you should also retain the services of a consultant to help you express your teaching passion and skill in powerful prose in your application letters and CV.

A final note of encouragement: Labby's most inspiring biology teachers in college, and the ones who catalyzed an interest in a research career, were not the most active researchers on campus. You obviously have the ability for high-quality research—the only issue is how much and how fast. Meanwhile, if you craft your job search properly, you may get a faculty position in which you will have an opportunity to influence a whole generation of biologists. Labby detects your passion. Bring it on! ■

—*Labby*