



## COLUMN

# The best contacts

To get a job these days, don't rely on your adviser — use your own networking skills, says **Peter Fiske**.

For students, entering work can be strange and unsettling. At university, the expectations and metrics of success were clearly laid out. In the 'outside world', the rules are different and the expectations undefined.

Having spent so long in academia, where your adviser is the centre of your solar system, it is natural to assume that he or she will play a similar role in your job search. In the old model, you would toil away at your studies, proving yourself in the eyes of your adviser. Then, when it is time for you to leave, he or she picks up the phone, dials a few colleagues, and lands you a plum position.

Things may once have worked that way (although I have my doubts), but this system is a myth today. Not only is your adviser less influential than you think, but his or her network is probably restricted to a narrow group of colleagues. A successful job search must have you, not your adviser, at its centre.

### IT'S NOT WHO YOU KNOW ...

Your network of friends and acquaintances is the key. Studies of social and professional networks have found that it is not the people in your immediate network who connect you to your next job; rather, it is often the people they know. Even if you think you have a big network, it is still small in comparison to the number of potential employers, and likely to be skewed to the environment in which you have spent most of your time. But the networks of the people in your network may represent a larger and more diverse group. This is one of the best reasons to join an online network group such as LinkedIn; the people your

friends and colleagues know, and where they are, can be critical information.

Perhaps you've seen an advert for a postdoc position at a pharmaceutical company. It sounds perfect. To increase your chances of success, you could get a contact of a contact to make an introduction. Through that introduction, you can gain insight into the job advertised or, more importantly, get an introduction to the person making the hiring decision.

Or perhaps your interest is intellectual-property law. You need someone familiar with the field — its nuances and how to find a position. An informational interview with a contact by phone or, even better, in person can help. Don't know anyone in the field? Someone in your broader network probably does.

Universities often keep a database of alumni and their professional histories. Many of these individuals stay loyal to their alma maters, and are happy to help fellow alumni. And if your job search focuses on a particular place, a local alumni chapter can assist you. Conferences and short courses are also an excellent way to deepen your network in a specific area.

Your adviser may be very supportive and willing to make calls and write letters on your behalf. But to maximize your chances, you need to rely on your network. To paraphrase the old saying: it's not just what you know that matters. And it's not just who you know. It's who 'who you know' knows. ■

**Peter Fiske** is chief executive of PAX Water Technologies in San Rafael, California, and author of *Put Your Science to Work* (American Geophysical Union, 2001).

## SINGAPORE

### Biomedical investment

Singapore's S\$3.7-billion (US\$2.8-billion) government investment in biomedical research, announced this month, will include funding and scholarships for early-career biomedical scientists. The allocation is part of a S\$16.1-billion initiative to boost research and innovation by 2015. Specifics will be announced early next year, says Adela Foo, a spokeswoman for the Agency for Science, Technology and Research. But she says that the funds will include an S\$800-million allocation for the creation of programmes to attract local and international young scientific talent. Foo says that the total funding amount will be shared by research institutions, including the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, and is expected to create faculty posts.

## ARGENTINA

### Huge scholarship rise

Argentina's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation has announced around 3,700 extra PhD and postdoc science scholarships for 2011. The ministry's National Council of Scientific and Technical Research will add the merit-based awards to this year's total of 8,122, which marked a 350% increase in government scholarships since 2003. The stipend amounts for those awards have increased by as much as 400% since 2004. "We need more scientists in order to enter the knowledge-based economy," says Lino Barañao, the science minister. The scholarships are open to all nationalities, he says. Argentina aspires to be a training centre for Latin America.

## FUNDING

### Early-career praise

Participants in a briefing in Washington DC on 7 October argued that early-career scientists are key to innovation. Co-hosted by Research!America, an advocacy group in Alexandria, Virginia, the event sought to persuade legislators that funding young scientists can seed discoveries that bring economic primacy. James Gentile, president of the Research Corporation for Science Advancement in Tucson, Arizona, noted that 41 of his group's early-career grantees have gone on to win Nobel prizes. Budget decreases will "undercut scientists waiting to establish careers," says Stacie Propst, vice-president of policy and outreach at Research!America. "We will lose a generation."