

YOUNG SCIENTIST

Women mentoring women

Scientists generally agree that finding mentors for young people attracts them to, and keeps them in, science. This is particularly true for women and minorities. But with few women and minorities at faculty level, where should the mentors come from? This question spurred the development of a mentoring programme at Caltech in 2003 called Women Mentoring Women (WMW).

A cooperative effort of several groups on campus, led by the women's centre, the WMW programme pairs graduate students with female postdocs. It also offers group mentoring in the form of book discussions about women in science and professional-development presentations given by faculty members.

This spring, 22 graduate women and postdocs participated in the pilot WMW. The evaluations showed that postdoc mentors gained as much as the graduate students, reinforcing the belief that mentoring benefits both sides.

In the current academic year, WMW's numbers have risen to 62, and it is expected to expand even further in 2004-05. Its participants hope it will serve as a model that will spread to other institutions suffering a dearth of female faculty members, providing mentors for young women scientists at a crucial point in their careers. ■

Helen McBride, Caltech Postdoctoral Association

Scientists are among the most educated people on the planet, yet many fail to use effective employment strategies. Uncovering opportunities and jockeying for position requires more street sense than academic ability. So focus on your goals and use the following guidelines.

Take a multidimensional approach. Move beyond passive job-seeking to more active methods: face-to-face networking, searching the Internet, checking scientific-association journals and getting to know recruiters. For the best use of your time, try all of these from the start.

Keep it live. Spend most of your time networking or meeting potential employers in person. The Internet offers job postings and employer information, but the decision to make an offer rests with human beings. At a career fair one drug-company recruiter said his firm received more than 1,000 applications a



With Deb Koen
Careers consultant

week through its website. A referral by an employee gives you much better odds of landing an interview. That's equally true in academia, clinical settings and small enterprises.

Structure your time. Schedule time each day for your search. In the initial preparatory phase (self-assessment, employer research, CV/resumé development) you can work day or night. But the next, contacting phase consists of phone calls and meetings that are best held during the working day.

Go the extra mile. In a tightened economy, most

job seekers are covering basic etiquette. To stand out, follow up every networking call and job interview with a personal letter or e-mail, reinforcing your interest and highlighting your potential contributions.

Work on your image. Apart from your scientific expertise, nothing carries more weight in winning you a job offer than the way you present yourself in writing and in person. Begin with a polished CV or resumé. Then develop speaking points about your goals and accomplishments that convey who you are and what you have to offer. Practice these with a colleague you can count on for honest criticism. After you've made selected employers aware of your background and skills, it's your communication that will close the deal. ■

Deb Koen is vice-president of Career Development Services and a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal's CareerJournal.com*.

MOVERS

Alex Matter, Director, Novartis Institute for Tropical Diseases, Singapore



When Alex Matter went into industry 28 years ago, academic colleagues warned that the move would mark "the end of my scientific career", he says. Since then he has managed to usher a successful cancer drug through the development pipeline and has now moved back into a more academic environment.

That's not to say his career path was easy when it veered off into industry. He found the shift initially "pretty horrible",

because many of the people who had recruited him were gone by the time he arrived, making it hard for him to get his bearings. "I had to find my way through this labyrinth," Matter says. After a year of negotiating the maze, he assembled his research team — only to learn that the project they wanted to take on was to be killed. "I discovered this sort of thing is very routine," Matter says.

His advice to anyone considering a similar path in drug discovery? Get used to adversity. Having projects shelved, stalled or killed "should not deter you", he says. It taught him to find bosses who were on the same page. That strategy led him to Ciba-Geigy, where a friend said, "Let's do something in cancer".

That friend left not long after Matter joined, too. But Matter spent the next three months in the library, inspired by a string of oncogene discoveries. He was convinced that there must be a better way to target cancer: chemotherapy, he

felt, had "plateaued" and immunotherapy seemed ineffective. So he became captivated by kinases and hit the books.

The gap between inspiration and results proved long and tedious. He wrote down the general concept underlying Glivec/Gleevec (imatinib mesylate) in 1983, formed a team that had a molecule ready in 1992, and after many ups and downs in preclinical studies, it finally entered clinical trials in 1998. The drug was approved in 2001.

That slog also taught him something else about surviving in the high-stakes world of drug discovery. "You have to have bread-and-butter projects in order to pursue the high-risk stuff," he says.

Now, he thinks his goal at the Novartis Institute of finding drug leads for tuberculosis and dengue fever within three years is "immensely do-able, as we have much more information than when we started on Glivec". He has also learned that tenacity reaps rewards. ■

CV 1996-2003: Head of the Oncology Therapeutic Area at the Novartis research department in Basel, Switzerland

1983-1996: Head of the Cancer and Bone/Bone Metabolism Therapeutic Area of Ciba-Geigy in Basel

1986-1997: Head of AIDS research at Ciba-Geigy

1980-83: Director of the Immunology Research Laboratories of Schering in France

1975-1980: Group leader in tumour immunology at F. Hoffmann-La Roche in Basel