

Managing Your Relationship with Your Supervisor

Brianna Blaser

NPA Meeting

March 28, 2009

Common Issues with Supervisors?

- Authorship
- Post-postdoc employment
- Funding
- General personality conflict
- Professional development

2008 Science Careers Postdoc Survey

- $\geq 20\%$ reported problems concerning:
 - Career guidance
 - Job security
 - Gaining technical skills
 - Understanding expectations
 - Communication
 - Family-friendly workplace

Why do issues occur?

- High hopes
- Power imbalance
- Pressure on PIs
- A need to improve communication

Introduction

- Choosing a position
- Setting goals and expectations
- Preventing and dealing with issues
- Leaving a position

Choosing a position

- Do your research
 - Talk to the PI, postdocs, grad students, lab techs
 - Visit the lab
 - PI's CV and publications

Things to learn more about:

- Research projects
- Funding
- Philosophies
- Job placements
- Expectations
- Size of the group
- Availability of the PI
- Publications
- Duration of appointment
- Supervising
- Transferable skills
- Salary & benefits

Ask other postdocs about:

- Their research interests
- Career development
- Networking
- Work environment
- Lab morale

Setting goals and expectations

- It's never too late!
- Set goals
- Determine your expectations
- Talk with your PI
- Put it in writing
- Periodic review

Goals for postdocs

- Set goals related to:
 - Research
 - Transferable skills and professional development
 - Post-postdoc employment

Reasonable expectations of your PI

- Available
- Knowledgeable
- Feedback and constructive criticism
- Preparation for the future
- Letters of recommendation
- And yet... PIs are busy

Talk to your supervisor

- Decide how to approach the conversation
- Expectations of you
 - Work hours
 - Resources
 - Publishing
- Your goals and expectations
- Authorship policies
- And?

Putting it in writing

- FASEB - Individual Development Plan
- GREAT Group - Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors
- Mentoring contracts/agreements
- Policies on collaboration and cooperation

Your day-to-day relationship

- General communication skills
- Meeting with your supervisor
- Periodic evaluation
- Negotiation skills
- Other resources

Phil Dee's Rules for Managing Your Relationship with Your Advisor

 **C**ommunicate with your boss

 **K**eep your boss informed

 **D**iscover what makes your boss tick

 **E**arn your boss's respect

 **A**ssert yourself

 **W**rite for your boss

Managing Up

- Know what matters
- Say no
- Talk like your boss
- Toot your own horn
- Lunch with your boss
- Seek new responsibilities
- Be curious

Meetings with your supervisor

- Ensures regular communication
- Scheduling
- Prepare ahead of time
- Talk about:
 - Progress
 - Next steps
 - Other issues

Periodic Evaluations

- Problem-solve and set goals
- Meet one to two times a year
- Talk about achievements, goals, and changes that need to be made
- Find forms online

Negotiating through Conflicts

- Approach your supervisor when problems arise
- Separate the people from the problem
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Invent options for mutual gain
- Use objective criteria

Other resources

- Additional mentors
- Learn about resources for postdocs on campus
- Administrative staff
- Cultivate new relationships
- Filing complaints

Leaving a postdoc

- Communicate about your plans
- ... as appropriate
- Letters of reference
 - Ask appropriately
 - Make it easy for them
 - Bad recommendations

How will you handle postdocs?

“If I had one piece of advice to give, it’s that although you’ve been hired for your scientific skills and research potential, your eventual success will depend heavily on your ability to guide, lead, and empower others to do their best work.”

– Thomas Cech, HHMI

- Mission statements, mentoring agreements

Working with your own postdocs

- Keep your commitments
- Be open-minded
- Treat people decently
- Listen
- Establish and stick to policies
- Be honest
- Pay attention to career development
- Treat information as confidential

Case Studies

- Inspired by posts on the Science Careers Forum
- Divide into 5 groups.
- Take 10 minutes to discuss your postdoc.