

# ADVANCE

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## *The Postdoctoral Experience: A Unique Mentoring Situation*

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"No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars or sailed an uncharted land or opened a new doorway for the human spirit."

Helen Keller (1880-1968)

# Postdocs wear many hats



- Highly trained professional scientist
- Ability to be productive right away, perform requested work – employee
- Share common research interests and goals with lab director, potential for synergism – colleague/collaborator
- Have the ability to mentor other more junior members of laboratory – mentor
- There to acquire new skills, further guidance toward independent research career – mentee

# Requires fine balance

- All of these roles are critical components of the optimal postdoc experience
  - carrying out assigned work: builds CV
  - being a good collaborator: foundation of scientific careers
  - experience with mentoring: heart of academic research
  - being mentored: critical for establishing independence
- But there must be a fine balance among each of these roles of mentee, mentor, colleague, employee

# Strike a balance



- Postdocs: be aware of these 4 roles and make sure your experience is a combination of all 4
- Mentors: be aware of these 4 roles and make sure you are providing a balanced experience of all 4

# Another delicate balance

- Encouraging, giving help, direction
- Sufficient independence for "ownership" of project
  
- Initial broad area of research focus
- Allow to select specific path, room to explore
- Forks in the road

# Forks in the Road



- Opportunities to teach strategic thinking
  - what work is most important
  - high risk vs risk-averse
  - how long a line of investigation should be pursued
  - what resources should be allocated
  - explain basis for decisions all along way, concrete examples of strategic thinking

# From the beginning....

- Come to agreement on expectations right away:
  - \* career goals
  - \* post-doc training period
  - \* intellectual property, especially at transition
  - \* authorship – especially at transition
  - \* freedom to pursue own research interests vs. goals of laboratory
  - \* milestones
  - \* funding expectations



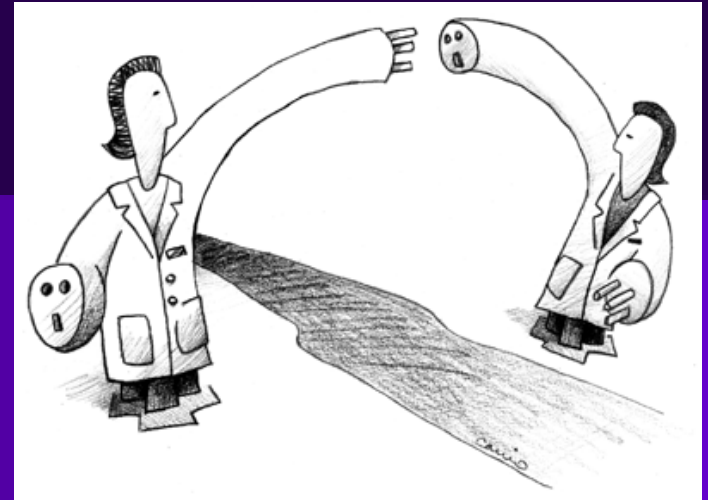
# Things I wished I'd known...

- Grant writing
  - review process
  - funding agencies
- Manuscript review process
  - how journals work
- Interface between science and commercialization
- Speaking to the public/media about research
- Regulatory compliance
- The job search
- Team building, personnel management
- Learning about how different types of universities work
  - complex, differ widely

# Transitions

- Understand clearly career goals
- For postdocs interested in competitive academic position, help establish a project that can be taken with them
- Help steer away from projects that are directly in line with senior competitors
- Encourage application for transition funding
- Help with networking, job hunt

# Networking



- One of most important benefits conferred on trainees is admission to professional network
- Trainees meet with seminar speakers
- Take to meetings, introduce
- Encourage trainees to approach your colleagues about scientific matters, using your name

# Moving On...



- Next physical career move – job hunt
- Moving on mentally, emotionally
- Keep in touch...
  - increasingly important part of own network
  - will continue to need help
- Having a postdoc succeed and eventually become a colleague is one of the greatest joys