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## Advice

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### **The Need for Self-Promotion in Scientific Careers**

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"I spend 60 per cent of my time doing the best damn job I know how to do. I spend 20 per cent of my time making sure everyone knows what a good job I am doing. And I spend the remaining 20 per cent of my time looking around for an even better job." -- A physicist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

You can argue with the percentages, but don't ignore the message. As a professional, you want to believe your "good deeds" are all that is needed to advance in your scientific career, but this is just not the way the world works. If you want credit for your accomplishments, you need to find ways to promote yourself.

Promoting yourself doesn't have to mean shameless glad-handing, appearing on The Oprah Winfrey Show, or becoming what a recent opinion article in The Chronicle of Higher Education called a "publicity intellectual." Indeed, such efforts are usually counterproductive, particularly in the sciences. The last thing you want to be is all show and no substance. Yet, while there is no substitute for substance, that alone is not enough. You need to let others know what you have done, which, in a nutshell, is what we mean by self-promotion.

The key to promoting yourself is to explain to others what you have done in ways that are also helpful to them. For maximum effect, you also need to employ multiple channels to get the word out about your activities. Doing so puts everyone in a win-win situation.

Let's look at how this strategy might work in three key areas: publishing, scientific conferences, and sabbaticals.

Don't just publish, republish

Publishing, particularly in reviewed journals, is the most time-honored and recognized way to let others know of your accomplishments. As Peter J. Feibelman, author of *A Ph.D. Is Not Enough: A Guide to Survival in Science* (Perseus Press, 1994), puts it:

"To succeed, you must make your talents well known and widely appreciated. Publishing provides you with an important way to accomplish that. Your papers, available in libraries around the world, represent not only your product but also your résumé. Compelling, thoughtful, well-written articles are a timeless advertisement for yourself."

Yet, with over 60,000 different scientific journals published each year, only a small number of people in your specialty will read your articles. To make the best use of your prized publications you need to republish them to a wider audience of "nearby colleagues."

Such colleagues are people not in your line of sight, but still in your field of vision -- people you want to influence, such as the colleague down the hall, your department chair, your dean, and other professionals in industry and at other academic institutions.

Because these people are not in your specialty, they are going to need some help in appreciating what you have done.

A chemistry professor at Stanford regularly assigns her Ph.D. students the task of summarizing her publications, which are often jointly written by the students, in ways that can be understood by beginning undergraduate chemistry majors. Explaining one's work to non-specialists is an important learning experience for her students.

She then distributes the summaries to her undergraduates, but also sends them, along with the original article, to her nearby colleagues. By doing so she gets the benefit of explaining her work to a broader audience while also maintaining her scholarly credibility via her original peer-reviewed article.

Conferences: capturing what is really going on

Since you already attend professional conferences, why not use them as a way to promote yourself by sharing with others what you have learned? Conferences are ideal places to find out what is hot in your field, observe various debates and controversies, meet interesting people, make contact for future interactions, and, in general, participate in the milieu of your field.

Yet, as most conference attendees know, the action lies not in the talks themselves, which are usually available later as conference proceedings, but in the hallways, at dinners, and in informal seminars. The nuggets gleaned from these events are almost never publicly shared.

I know a geophysics professor who has his graduate students and

postdocs at such meetings take notes during question-and-answer sessions, and record other engaging events and conversations. The students like the role of news hounds, which often leads them to interesting future contacts.

While taking care not to spread rumors or gossip, the professor and his graduate students then produce a much sought-after electronic newsletter e-mailed to colleagues around the world. Bringing his name, and those of his students, to the attention of other scientists through a valuable service such as a newsletter is another example of a win-win situation.

A sabbatical worth noting

When Lance Glasser was denied tenure at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the late 1980s he decided to spend 18 months at the Hitachi Central Research Laboratories in Japan. He left for Asia with his wife and two children, without having a job to return to in the United States. Here is how he solved that problem:

"About once a quarter, I would write a 10-15 page 'newsletter' and send it to people I knew back in the United States. I sent it to about 30 or so people, and I'm sure it got passed around quite a bit as well. The newsletter had a twofold purpose: to document the interesting things I was doing and finding out about, and to keep me in front of people who might need my services when I came back to the United States."

Glasser, now vice-president for Advanced Programs at KLA Instruments in Santa Clara, Cal., credits his newsletter with helping him land a position as the director of the Electronics Technology

Office of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) upon his return from Japan.

Keeping people informed about your work, even while out of their sight, is a key principle behind self-promotion.

The above examples are just a few of the many ways you can help yourself while also helping others -- the key to self-promotion. In future columns I will explore this theme in greater detail by looking at how it can help you at all stages of your professional development.

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