

## Tomorrow's Academic Careers

### Beyond Academia – Five Conference Take-Aways

The fifth annual [Beyond Academia](#) career conference, held March 2-3, 2017 at UC Berkeley, offered a wealth of information, advice, and inspiration.

Hundreds of PhD students and postdocs gathered to explore a broad range of careers. The [program](#) included about 20 panels of PhDs working in non-faculty careers, a dozen workshops on career skills, and two keynote addresses.

Here are my five top take-aways from the conference.

#### **A Difference between Academia and Industry**

Keynote speaker, [Alexandra Zafiroglu](#), an anthropologist who works for [Intel](#), shared one important difference between academia and industry.

Academic research is driven by questions. The more questions the better. The ability to ask really good questions is the hallmark of a good scientist and scholar. Every answer leads to a host of additional questions.

In industry, by contrast, solutions are the name of the game. Each question drives a quest for solutions. “Give me solutions, not problems,” is the mantra.

One clue that you are on the wrong track. “That is interesting,” is the highest compliment in academic circles.

In industry, however, “That’s interesting,” is a polite brush off. It is not a good thing to hear. The compliment you seek is “That is useful.”

#### **Write a One-Sentence Mission Statement**

To focus your industry job search, write a one sentence “background and interest statement” before you start looking. The two parts of this sentence capture what you have done (your background and experience) and where you want to go (your professional interests). It links the past and the future. Here are three examples:

“I am a cell biologist with a background in angiogenesis research and an interest in improving therapeutics for breast cancer.”

“I am an anthropologist with a deep experience in ethnographic research methods (participant observation, interviewing, and deep listening) in communities around the world, with an interest in improving the experiences that consumers have with new technologies.”

“I am an electrical engineer with a background studying a variety of renewable energy systems, with an interest in developing and optimizing ocean wave energy production systems.”

This mission statement will help you:

- Identify companies that do what you want to do
- Identify functional areas in which people do what you want to do
- Explain your goal to everyone you talk with
- Identify people who do what you want to do, and talk to them, to get their advice. (This is a way to expand your network.)

### **Connect Scientist to Scientist**

When you are applying for a job posting in industry, your application is more likely to get careful consideration if it is endorsed by someone within the organization. This could be someone you know, but it might also be a stranger who—like you—has a PhD and understands the knowledge and skills you offer.

After applying through the formal channels, send another copy of your materials to a scientist in the company. Surprisingly, this is not seen as annoying. They want to make sure that talented people are hired.

Here is a sample email that has been successful for others:

*Dear Dr. Adams,*

*I have been reading with interest about the scientific developments at Abgenix. Because of my background in XYZ, I have been reading with particular interest the fascinating work, ABC, that you have been doing in the area of XYZ.*

*I recently saw a job posting on the Abgenix website for a [Job Title] (Job #12345), for which I feel I am very well qualified. I have already applied on-line to the Human Resources website, but I was wondering if you would be willing to also send my attached resume to the scientist who is hiring for the [Job Title] position? Or, if you are the hiring scientist, I hope you will read my resume and consider contacting me for an interview.*

*Thank you for your assistance,*

*Your name, affiliation, contact info.*

Both of these pieces of advice come from [Bill Linstaedt](#), Assistant Vice Chancellor for Career Advancement, International and Postdoctoral Services at [UCSF](#). Both the [Office of Career and Professional Development](#) and [Office for Postdoctoral](#)

Scholars are under his leadership. For over 15 years, he has worked with thousands of PhDs and postdocs who are seeking meaningful careers.

### **Approach a Presentation Like an Actor**

Making presentations is something that every PhD student and postdoc does. Presentations are part of job interviews, especially for technical positions. Whether your goal is to inform, teach, inspire, or persuade, your presentation will be better if you adopt some techniques used by actors.

Actress and acting teacher Lura Dolas offered these suggestions. Both of these strategies are used before you ever start talking. They will help avoid some common pitfalls:

- Stiffness in your body
- Lack of initial rapport with listeners
- Lack of energy
- Monotonous pitch, speech rate, and volume

### **Warm up before Your Presentation**

Actors warm up before every performance. You needn't spend an hour warming up your voice and body. Even five minutes are worthwhile. These activities should be done in a private space, while you are standing. (Don't do this in your car.) These are noisy, and you will look and sound foolish.

- Stand in neutral position: your head aligned atop your spine. Feet hip distance apart. Knees loose. Hands at your side.
- Breathe deeply, into your rib cage. (Video from the National Theater demonstrates warm up breathing.)
- Bend over slowly. First relax your head so your chin touches your chest. Allow your shoulders to fall forward. Bend forward vertebra by vertebra until your hands touch the ground. Roll back up.
- Massage your jaw to relax your mouth and allow it to move. Grab your jowls and wiggle your jaw. (This looks completely ridiculous.)
- Warm up your voice. Repeat the sounds "Mee-Mah-Moh-Moo" from a high pitch to a low pitch.
- Practice articulating. Repeat these tongue twisters: "Yellow leather black leather red leather." "Box of biscuits." (The National Theater has video for this too.)

### **Connect before You Start**

Your audience wants to trust you. They want to come on the journey with you. Before you ever utter a sentence, you can build empathy and connection. This helps establish your credibility.

Here are the first moves when you go to the front of the room:

- 1 Audiences trust speakers who are alive and breathing. Be centered. Stand in a neutral, grounded position.
- 2 Embody the verb “reassure.” Through your demeanor project reassurance. You want the audience to feel safe with you. To trust you.
- 3 Smile.
- 4 Make eye contact with three or four people in different parts of the room. Say or think, “Hello. Welcome.” Think (don’t say), “I am here. Your troubles are over.”
- 5 Breathe again.

Then begin.