

Partnerships

In the past year, I've pondered what makes postdoctoral training a positive and productive experience. My recipe for success includes choosing a good mentor, being resilient with experiments, obtaining external funding, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, having a clear vision, thriving in challenging environments, developing skills for scientific survival and adapting to change. Of course maintaining a sense of humour and having a winning attitude are also helpful. However, for me, the key ingredient is having good partners and co-workers.

As I contemplate the path I've taken in choosing to pursue a PhD and an academic postdoc, I recognize the many people integral to my journey. The people for whom and with whom I have worked have been just as important as what I have worked on, if not more so. It's been said that it takes a village to raise a child, and I believe that it also takes a village to raise a young scientist.

The foundation of my village is my family, who deeply value education and whose support and sacrifices enabled me to pursue my aspirations. My parents always say that a good education will take you places, as when our family was able to successfully relocate to the United States because of their professional qualifications. I grew up witnessing their hard work, perseverance and faith in the pursuit of 'the American dream', and the values that they instilled in me by their example are the cornerstone of the person – and the scientist – I am today.

The pillars of my village are my mentors who have nurtured my academic growth. This includes my high-school teacher, who not only introduced me to my first hands-on lab experience, but also shared her passion for science. Through her collaboration with a local college, she gave students access to lab equipment and reagents, and even designed an independent study course outside usual classes. And it includes my college mentor. She encouraged me in applying for summer internships to learn new techniques, presenting my data at national conferences to hone communication skills and supervising younger students to gain leadership experience. Thirteen years after our first meeting, we still discuss topics ranging from fellowship applications to balancing my outreach activities with my research goals.

The community of my village is composed of my network of collaborators, colleagues, friends and funding agencies, who provide me with various forms of support that are instrumental to my training. When I need assistance with a piece of software, a protocol for a certain technique, funds for a particular project, advice on a given situation or even just someone to listen, these are the people who give, share, offer, find or lend.

Finally, the heart of my village is my husband, my partner in both my personal and professional goals and dreams. Belonging to a two-scientist home has brought its share of challenges, such as the lengthy negotiations and debates that both preceded and followed our decision to pursue postdoctoral training in London. But I am grateful to be with someone who knows firsthand the ups and downs of life as a PhD, from the joys of having a manuscript accepted or a fellowship awarded, to the disappointments of getting a negative result or being scooped. And having 24-hour

access to in-house peer review and technical advice as well as emotional support is a bonus.

As I look back on the road that has brought me from Los Angeles to New York for graduate school, then on to London for my postdoc, I am most grateful to the people I have encountered along the way. I am not sure where the next two years of my postdoctoral training will lead me. But I trust that I will be able find my way, not only through my own efforts, but through the efforts of the village that continues to raise me.

So as I end my year's tenure as a postdoc journal keeper, perhaps my most important message is that in lab, as in love, it is important to have partners who make you better than you are alone.

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