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Thinking ahead

Deb Koen tends to have a positive outlook. Vice-president for Career Development Services in Rochester, New York, and a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal's* online careers section, Koen admits that the scientific job market is tough at the moment. But this is still an opportunity, she told attendees at a career fair sponsored by *Naturejobs* and the New York Biotechnology Association this month.

Rather than using the economic conditions as an excuse for not getting a new job, Koen told the meeting that scientists should use them as motivation to hone their skills for basic job hunting and career building. These techniques are often neglected in prosperous times, when scientists' core skills are in demand. But when the job market contracts, they can prove to be invaluable.

The key, Koen said, is being proactive about your career — think of it as a constant quest to find the best match between your skills, values and interests, and those of an employer. Landing a job where these attributes don't match might help to pay the bills, but it will ultimately result in dissatisfaction. To avoid this, Koen suggested that scientists should keep a career journal. Start with your long-term goals, and then identify short-term goals, such as key projects you want to take on or new skills you want to develop. Also, note any trends that are highlighted by the media.

Being proactive goes beyond writing things down, Koen said, it entails following up on your goals. And it means networking — not by introducing yourself to strangers who you hope might help your career, but by being actively involved in your community. It also means seeking feedback — not just before tenure or during performance reviews, and not just from supervisors, but from colleagues and collaborators at different stages of a project. Perhaps then you will be able to make the most of a depressed job market.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor

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