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A team effort

When Lance Armstrong won his fourth Tour de France last year, he not only followed tradition by dividing the prize money among his team-mates, he also doubled the amount to his fellow cyclists out of his own pocket. This largesse recognized that without his team's support, Armstrong wouldn't have won the race. It also demonstrates best practice in team science — rewarding the supporting cast that makes a lead author's findings possible, rather than hoarding all of the credit for oneself.

Last month the US National Institutes of Health held a symposium on how to promote selflessness in the name of team science, primarily for the benefit of biologists in the United States. But its findings (see *Nature* 424, 1; 2003) could improve the fortunes of scientists in other disciplines or other countries who are considering joining large projects.

In some respects, this discussion is long overdue — large team efforts have dominated science in recent years. The Human Genome Project and most experiments in high-energy physics are prime examples, and such endeavours often feature a cast of hundreds. But institutions that grant scientists tenure, extend contracts and give pay rises haven't always recognized the varied contributions made to these projects.

So recognition may have to come from the scientists themselves. Although scientists may not have pockets as deep as Armstrong's, they can match his spirit in other ways. First, they can give younger scientists who make key contributions first authorship of main papers, and rotate first authorship of supporting papers among group members. They can also include details of the roles that each group member played in the work. Finally, they can remind tenure-granting institutions over and over again that a winning author is surrounded by a supporting cast, and that all should be rewarded.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor

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