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Tuning in to yourself

When I've talked to scientists about how they got to where they are, their journeys often turn out to have been surprisingly undirected. When Ravinder Maini (see page 180) was earning his MD, for example, I doubt that he set himself the goal of discovering an antibody that would help to treat autoimmune diseases and win him a Lasker award. But he followed his interests, intuition and the advice of his mentor, and went into clinical research rather than clinical practice.

This year *Naturejobs* is asking four graduates to keep a formal career journal that notes what happens to them day by day — not to ensure that they win a Lasker award, but rather to tune into how their likes and dislikes could shape the kind of career they want. The idea, according to Deb Koen, who writes about how to keep a career journal in this week's Nuts & Bolts (see page 180), is to become self-aware enough to find the best career path for you.

At three different career-panel discussions recently — in London, Boston and Connecticut — at least one panellist has encouraged students and postdocs to “do what you like”. But that isn't always easy, says Koen. Scientists tend to think of workplace preferences in terms of research — a penchant for signal transduction over genetics, or developmental biology over oncology. Analysing your own likes and dislikes throughout the day may be a better guide, because although scientific problems change, personalities are relatively fixed.

Koen asked the four diarists to start with basic questions such as: what do you spend your time on each day, and what do you like and dislike about each aspect of these tasks? Such questions are not limited to grad-school diarists — keeping them in mind can help even established scientists make a change for the better.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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