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## To plan...or not to plan?

Many senior scientists achieved success without drawing up a clear path for their career beforehand — a fact emphasized by several speakers at a recent careers fair. But those same panellists also affirmed the need for planning. This apparent paradox confused many who attended the New York fair, which was sponsored by *Naturejobs* and the New York Academy of Sciences. Indeed, many young scientists returned to the topic time and again during the subsequent question-and-answer sessions.

Keynote speaker Peter Corr set both the theme and the tone of the questions that would follow. Senior vice-president for science and technology at drugs firm Pfizer, Corr talked about how, as a young academic climbing the tenure track, he couldn't have imagined that he would one day be a manager at the world's biggest pharmaceutical company.

Later panellists described how they too had had difficulty predicting their future. But they said you should be prepared to try — especially in job interviews, which can present a tricky intersection between selling your ambitions either too long or too short. The trick is to show that you want to grow and learn, but not necessarily give

too much detail, said Grace Wong, chief scientific officer of ActoKine Therapeutics, a biotech company in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

Of course, there are exceptions, said Scott Wadsworth, a research fellow at pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson. For example, a candidate who plans to work in a company for a few years and then go on for medical training would be welcome at a drugs firm because their desire to learn would still benefit the company, Wadsworth said.

Corr's opening remarks actually supplied some answers to the questions that arose in later sessions. Rather than trying to predict what the next job or position is, he said, you should learn something new every day, work on projects outside your skill set and comfort zone, and treat people well. The future should then take care of itself.



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