

MOVERS

Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, dean, Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management, University of California, Santa Barbara



1998-2005: Member of the Bundestag, Berlin, Germany
1991-2000: Founding president, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Berlin, Germany
1984-91: Director, Institute for European Environmental Policy, Bonn, Germany

Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker is proof that scientific disciplines don't define destiny — personal energy does. He has worked on projects on a wide range of topics, from climate and energy to world peace, as both a researcher and a politician. This isn't too surprising: von Weizsäcker studied chemistry and physics at the University of Hamburg in Germany, only to switch to biology for a PhD on honeybee vision at Freiburg University. "I always sensed that the mainstream disciplinary approach was exhausted — that the new fields of interests were located at the interface of existing disciplines," he says.

Always an environmentalist, who also describes himself as an opportunist, he has sought a highly varied career. After finishing graduate school during the cold war, he used his natural-sciences background to do research on peace at the Protestant Research Institute in Heidelberg, Germany. Following both a professorship in interdisciplinary biology at the University of Essen and his involvement with the German Social Democratic Party, he wrote a book on university reform. This interest inspired him not only to become founding president of the University of Kassel, but to create several interdisciplinary research centres, including the first in Germany devoted to organic farming.

In 1991, he formed the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, a think-tank seeking radical policy approaches to eco-efficiency: maximizing the value of products or services while reducing their environmental burden. He realized that the obstacles had less to do with scientific knowledge and more to do with policy.

He was so passionate about the eco-efficiency cause that he successfully ran for a seat in Germany's parliament, the Bundestag. For the past three years, he was chairman of the Bundestag Environment Committee, which pushed to align German environmental policies with European ones. "That was not overly successful," he admits. Politics is quite a difficult thing compared with the sciences, he says.

Resisting invitations to run again for parliament, he accepted an offer to direct the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He was impressed by its interdisciplinary structure, which combines science with management.

Given his varied career, von Weizsäcker's advice is not surprising. "Be bold. Don't stick to just one discipline. Use your curiosity in another discipline — and ask the questions those trained in the field would not ask." ■

Virginia Gewin

RECRUITERS & INDUSTRY

Grooming women entrepreneurs

Starting your own company is risky, and even more so when it is a life-science company. More and more women scientists are starting their own biotech companies, but they face many challenges in their transition to the business world. They often lack the business skills and networking savvy to obtain the resources needed to move their research from concept to product. Women In Bio (WIB) was formed to help budding entrepreneurs move from the bench to the board room and to help women advance in their life-science careers.

WIB offers networking opportunities, access to resources essential for business growth, and educational programmes on two tracks: corporate and professional development. On the corporate development programme, for example, our Entrepreneur and Executive Forum provides an intimate environment to meet with experts and have frank, open discussions on selected business topics, such as the role of the US Food and Drug Administration in drug development, potential liability for the life-sciences entrepreneur, and strategies for licensing of intellectual property.

The professional development programmes are aimed at building skills that may have an important impact on career advancement and career

satisfaction. Workshops are open to women in all fields of life science and centre on enhancing communication and negotiation skills. The goal is to equip women to feel more confident about expressing themselves in their professional and personal lives. A recent workshop, "Speaking Your Mind and Getting Heard", dealt with how to get one's ideas heard in meetings.

Networking is critical in career advancement and business growth. Networking events, such as an annual dinner, open up opportunities to meet women on different career paths and further explore the business world.

WIB members are entrepreneurs, executives, scientists, investors and professionals from life-sciences companies, academia, government and professional organizations across the United States. Most members live in Maryland and Washington DC and about a third are scientists, many at federal labs such as the National Institutes of Health, and include students and postdoctoral researchers.

One of our members, Mona Jhaveri, a cancer researcher, is starting up her own company to develop cancer drugs. She credits WIB for connecting her to other women who are now guiding her in her new venture. ■

Robbie Melton is the president and director of Women in Bio.

ALUMNUS JOURNAL

A new chapter

The year since I was a *Naturejobs* Graduate Journal writer was one of the most eventful times of my life. In my last journal entry, I wondered how I could move from research into a 'bigger picture' job, where I could share the excitement of science with a wider audience. As it turned out, my ramblings in *Naturejobs* had more impact than I imagined. Through my writing, I met people at *Nature*. Last May, while I was still working in the lab, I received an e-mail encouraging me to apply for a position that had opened up. I jumped at the chance and landed myself a dream job: for nine months I was going to be one of *Nature's* manuscript editors.

Juggling both thesis and job is not for the faint-hearted, but I would do it all over again. Working at *Nature* has been everything I wished for and more. Every day, cutting-edge papers land on my desk. I interact with some of the world's best scientists. I am an editor and writer, yet still in the thick of research. It's a massive responsibility, but an immense privilege.

Now a new opportunity has arisen. Next year, I will be in San Francisco, helping to launch a new journal under the *Nature* umbrella. I can't wait. And in the midst of all this, I found the love of my life. San Francisco will be a new chapter for both of us. They say that life is full of surprises, and they are right. My advice to graduate students looking for direction: act on crazy ideas, never give in, and go with the flow. Something will come up. ■

Amber Jenkins is an associate editor with Nature Publishing Group.