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# nature jobs

## Selling ourselves

At most career symposia, panellists describe their career trajectories and offer advice to audience members eager to know how the speakers got to their current positions. But the Nobel Pauling Naturejobs Symposium, held last month in Cambridge, Massachusetts, turned the tables. The panellists offered the usual helpful information. But the audience was also dragged into the act. Grace Wong, the meeting's organizer and chief scientific officer of the Cambridge biotech company Actokine Therapeutics, first encouraged, then cajoled and finally forced each of the 100 or so participants to tell their own career stories.

Wong's method? The 'smart pitch', a technique she has fostered to encourage young scientists to sell themselves — whatever the setting. Wong's *modus operandi* involves a moderator picking an audience member at random and giving them a minute to make an impression. The sometimes reluctant participants are encouraged to tell the audience something memorable about themselves, what they have to offer and what they are seeking — whether it be a job, a collaborator or venture capital.

As the meeting unfolded, each participant got a chance,

welcome or not, to make their pitch. Some of the initial ones were tentative, too long or overly technical. But as the meeting wore on, and became more relaxed, these advertisements grew more succinct, direct and polished.

This was a valuable exercise, because most scientists would admit they could be better at selling themselves. Thinking about how to make a smart pitch before the inevitable introductions can help them to take advantage of opportunities, expected and unexpected, to make connections that could lead to career progress. During the symposium, several young scientists drew interest from panel members looking for new employees, or who knew of colleagues seeking fresh scientific talent. Preparing for these moments is important: you never know when you'll have a microphone — literal or figurative — thrust in front of you.



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