

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
MAGAZINE FOR
SCIENTISTS**

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans,” John Lennon, singer and songwriter of The Beatles, once said. That sentiment resonated with panel members at a career talk last week organized by the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Discussing their careers to date, all of the panellists showed how adaptability to circumstances had trumped their plans and strategies for their working lives.

When Eric Staeva-Vieira, now a biotech analyst for Lazard Capital Markets in New York, was doing his PhD in the late 1990s, several of his fellow graduate students left for plum Wall Street jobs with lucrative salaries. He thought he could follow them — but then the stock-market bubble burst in 2001. So he dabbled in a small biotech firm, then worked as a programme director for the New York Academy of Sciences. Those experiences helped him meet people and learn more about the biotech industry — eventually leading him to his current position.

Sandra Kim, now a patent attorney in Pfizer’s New York office, had to tap into her adaptability when she faced a career crossroads. While she was an intern at a law firm, she had to decide whether to take a temporary administrative job with Pfizer or to hang on in the hope that her intern position would result in an offer of a permanent job. Kim opted for the temporary option, mortifying her family and friends, who thought she would be more financially secure with the law firm. But she used that position to learn more about Pfizer’s patenting activity — experience that eventually helped her to secure the kind of job she wanted with the drug firm.

After seven years of graduate work, Kristen Twidy decided she wouldn’t be satisfied with the academic career for which she had been preparing. Now a sales representative for inGenious Targeting Laboratory in Stony Brook, New York, Twidy did some biotech training and then a marketing internship. The woman who hired her left shortly after Twidy arrived, leaving her in a ‘sink or swim’ situation. She, like her fellow panellists, swam like a champ, demonstrating that agility sometimes beats foresight.

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