

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
MAGAZINE FOR
SCIENTISTS**

The course of true love never did run smooth — and the same can often be said of a relationship with science. At last week's meeting of the American Chemical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a careers session heard one such story of highs and lows.

Rachel Pytel discussed two personal timelines. Her career timeline was fairly typical — graduate school, recruitment on-campus, careers fairs — but her "attitude timeline" was a lot more revealing. When she began graduate school in 2002, Pytel summed up her attitude with the phrase: "Yay, science!" By 2003, disillusionment had set in and it was: "Man, I stink at this. Everyone's smarter than me." By 2004, she'd decided she didn't hate science, but she hated doing research. But Pytel would again refine her assessment, and she later decided that doing research was fine, as long it was applied and team-oriented. She elected to avoid academia and government and took a job at materials-science company Rohm and Haas.

At a separate session, other chemists discussed how they found career paths that both fuel their love of science and make them excited to go to work every day. Derrick Hamlin uses his master's degree in chemistry to bolster his law practice. It has helped him defend clients in drug, drink-driving and environmental cases. In one case, he exonerated a client facing arson charges by telling the jury about the evaporation rate of chemicals left behind when burning gasoline rather than kerosene.

Jennifer Mass uses her chemistry training in art conservation — investigating the chemistry behind art degradation and finding ways to restore damaged works. She and her colleagues, for example, showed that one reason for patches of faded colour in Matisse's painting *The Joy of Life* is that he used paints containing cadmium rather than the more expensive chromium.

For Pytel, the key was not finding an 'unconventional' job but planning her career search. She attributes her satisfaction with her career to patiently attending careers fairs, preparing for job interviews and carefully reflecting on what pace she wanted and skills she possessed. Only then did she once again exclaim: "Yay, science!"

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