and thus giving the appearance to Americans that they are not engaged, are passive and have no opinion. These differences can easily lead to unintended biases.

The problem may go beyond verbal communication. Grant applications to the US National Science Foundation from Asian principal investigators between 2004 and 2011 have been consistently funded in lower proportions than those from black, Hispanic and white principal investigators[5], which suggests that differences in writing styles may lead to biases. For example, east Asians' humble demeanour could cause them to describe the implications of their research in modest terms, which might bring them lower ratings from reviewers.

The idea of what makes a good leader in the United States needs to be re-examined. Cultural differences in communication style need further study; peer-review panels, managers and others should be trained to avoid biases. One model is the Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence programme at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Such programmes help scientists and engineers to be more effective in global collaborations and careers. At the same time, Asians need to recognize that hard work is not enough; they should seek training in communication, assertiveness and leadership skills.

The inequalities that mark the career arcs of Asian scientists and engineers in the United States are not widely discussed; the science community needs to bring greater attention to the data. We also need to look at whether Asians are recognized for their achievements, and whether they are receiving awards and becoming members of the US National Academies in numbers roughly equivalent to the proportion of Asians who rise to the level of full professor.

Diversity is said to be a strength of the United States. If cultural differences are recognized and respected, the country's scientific enterprise is sure to benefit. ■

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TURNING POINT
Sarah Blackford

Science-careers adviser Sarah Blackford, head of education and public affairs at the Society for Experimental Biology in Lancaster, UK, assumed that she would be a research scientist. But after she landed a contract-research post, she realized that her interests lay elsewhere, and she manoeuvred through a series of jobs from journal publishing to careers development. In October, Blackford published her first book, Career Planning for Research Bioscientists *(Wiley-Blackwell). She is on the steering committee for the* Naturejobs *Career Expo.*

What did you hate about research?
I used to find it really tough doing the experiments. I am just not a very practical, technical person, and don't follow protocol very well — I can't go by a recipe in the kitchen.

But were there aspects that you enjoyed?
Presenting results in papers and posters, and going to conferences. I also liked interacting with people — negotiating for equipment, for example. When my contract came to an end, I thought about scientific publishing. I would have a foot in science, but would not be doing lab work. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

How did you transfer to careers advising?
I was the assistant editor at the *Journal of Experimental Botany*, based at the University of Southampton, UK, and biologists there kept bringing me their CVs — because I worked in publishing, they thought I would be a guru on language and writing. I enjoyed helping them, so I started volunteering at the university's career-services centre. I helped with CV workshops and sat in on interviews.

How did you move into paid careers advising?
My job relocated to Lancaster University when the journal editor changed, so I went to volunteer with their career services — and this was the turning point for my life. They were looking for someone to cover for a person on sabbatical, and I got the job. It was for only three months, but I knew I had to take it — and as it turned out, the job lasted for two years. After that, I had enough experience to get a job at the University of Leeds, UK, for a year and a half, where I wrote marketing plans, organized conferences, liaised with employers, ran careers workshops.

What prompted you to write a book?
I missed working with scientists, and a job came up with the Society for Experimental Biology involving career development, science communication and education. I have been in the post since 1998. A few years ago, while running careers workshops at a conference in Finland, I was chatting with a marketing manager and said flippantly that one day I would put all this information into a book. When I got back to my office, I had an e-mail from the commissioning editor at a publishing house saying he understood that I was thinking about writing a book.

Why did you focus on bioscience careers?
All this valuable careers information is being directed to people at conferences, but there was almost nothing in writing for bioscientists.

Do you have advice for biomedicine postdocs?
They need to keep learning new techniques and skills. They need to campaign for better contracts, the right to develop management skills, the opportunity to teach or do whatever they want to do to improve their career prospects. They can't let their supervisor steer for them. Universities are employing fewer technicians now, and postdocs are in danger of becoming supertechs. They also need to decide whether taking a third postdoc is an advantage. It may be convenient, but they ought to ensure that it will build on their current capabilities so that they are improving their career prospects.

What caveats do you find yourself repeating to early-career biomedical researchers?
You have to sell yourself. One of the easiest ways is through social media and networks. You need to network, because it is other people who get you jobs. Postdocs especially aren't using social media and networks enough: LinkedIn, for example, is extremely valuable because a lot of recruiters use it. You can meet influential people online — modern networks are very democratic. Opportunities are out there. ■

INTERVIEW BY KAREN KAPLAN