



Wei-Chun Wei recommends learning about a lab's rules before starting work there.

Kopec. “You’ve talked with the other postdocs, the graduate students, the tech — and you can check on experiments from home and you have access to the data.”

If an exchange gets heated, try stepping back, perhaps by telling the other person that this is not the right moment to discuss the subject, and suggesting another time to talk, Nunez counsels. Kopec says that when she is upset, she takes a deep breath and heads out for a walk. “Only deal with conflict when you’re calm,” she says. Use the interlude to contemplate solutions.

Publishing is a frequent source of conflict. Perhaps a postdoc or graduate student has been contacted by a journal about submitting a paper, but the supervisor objects because the journal is not high-profile enough. The exchange has the potential to escalate: the junior researcher needs the publication for his or her CV, but the principal investigator refuses to consider the journal, and one or both parties start to fume.

One option, says Kopec, is to consider doing more experiments, amassing stronger data and submitting to a better journal. But she adds that junior researchers need to get used to not always getting their own way: “You have to remember that your boss is still your boss at the end of the day.”

It may also help to discuss any quarrel with a more senior lab member, administrator or mentor. “People need to know there’s help for them when they’re in conflict with a PI,” says Kathy Barker, a lab-management specialist

in Seattle, Washington. “It’s important to get out there, talk and get advice.” The university postdoctoral office or international-scholar office (where applicable) can also provide support and advice.

At the very least, says Kopec, talking the problem through with a third party will give the postdoc a chance to vent and discuss it. The international-scholar office can help in administrative disputes involving visas, given that lab leaders often don’t know the particulars of immigration law.

CALLING IT QUITS

Sometimes, no matter how much an early-career researcher may have tried to soothe troubled waters, the relationship with his or her supervisor may be unworkable or irretrievably damaged. Changing labs is not the career-destroyer some might fear; staying in a conflict-ridden environment can be much worse (see *Nature* **442**, 324–325; 2006 and *Nature* **470**, 129–131; 2011). “If it’s not working out in a lab, the postdoc and graduate student need to think about their career,” says Boss. “It’s a bad marriage and it needs to be annulled.”

If quitting seems to be the best path, it is important to approach the issue tactfully and diplomatically, to give at least a few weeks’ notice and to offer to finish a concrete set of tasks. “Don’t say, ‘Your lab is terrible, you’re a monster and no one should work for you,’” says Boss.

Instead, he recommends that graduate students or postdocs explain that they have a certain number of years left before their lab rotation or postdoc is over, and that they would like to act now to make a transition into another area of research at another lab. “Defuse the conflict and take the high road,” says Boss.

There may be logistical obstacles. If a postdoc is funded by a principal investigator’s grant or being paid for by the university, the principal investigator should not object and there should be little problem in giving appropriate notice and switching to the new lab. But a postdoc fellowship might be restricted to research in a specific field or discipline, which would make it difficult to transfer to a lab doing different work. The fellowship’s funding agency or foundation programme officer will be able to clarify the situation.

Ultimately, says Barker, managing conflicts is a finely nuanced balancing act. Early-career researchers must see to their own interests but avoid burning bridges with their principal investigators and other lab members. “Most bad situations will not fix themselves,” she says. “You have to advocate for yourself.” ■

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FACULTY

Minority mentoring

A study finds that mentoring can help life-sciences faculty members at US institutions that serve ethnic minorities to win more grants, boost their publication rates and participate in more professional activities, including attending scientific conferences and developing collaborations (A. G. Campbell *et al.* *CBE Life Sci. Edu.* **12**, 394–402; 2013). The study, published on 4 September, partnered 32 faculty members from minority-serving institutions with established scientists at research-intensive universities for 8–10-week internships between 1997 and 2011. Participants’ average number of publications rose from 0.84 before the internship to 1.37 afterwards. Their average number of grants increased from 0.06 to 0.59, up to four times the average of a control group of 129 faculty members at the same institutions who were not mentored.

REPRODUCIBILITY

Identification failure

Researchers are impeding reproducibility by not identifying experimental resources or properly sharing data, says a study (N. A. Vasilevsky *et al.* *PeerJ* **1**, e148; 2013). In the methods sections of 238 biomedical journal articles from 2012–13, 54% of resources such as antibody types and cell lines were not fully defined. A lack of identifiers also plagues online data-sharing, says lead author Nicole Vasilevsky, an ontologist at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, adding that editors, funding agencies and grant reviewers should mandate resource identification. “If researchers don’t keep track of what reagents they used, it could impact their own — and others’ — research,” she says.

SALARY

Maths degrees pay

US holders of master’s degrees in maths earn more than those with degrees in biology or chemistry, finds a report, *Higher Education Pays*. Research firm College Measures in Rockville, Maryland, analysed first-year salaries for 15,118 master’s holders in various fields from 2006 to 2011. Maths graduates typically earned US\$49,280–\$59,113, whereas biology graduates earned \$35,788–\$40,561 and chemistry graduates \$47,045–\$49,421. The numbers, says College Measures president Mark Schneider, imply high demand for mathematical problem-solving skills.