

NETWORKING

Joining up

Most professional associations for early-career researchers require only that members fit certain criteria, such as being a postdoc in a particular country. Others have stricter rules.

- **Global Young Academy, Berlin:** Members are chosen for the excellence of their science and their commitment to solving global problems. Prospective members must apply with a letter of support from their national academy, an equivalent body, their employer, their institution or another professional.

- **World Association of Young Scientists:** Membership is open to any early-career scientist who agrees with the association's goals, including promoting excellence and helping young scientists in their careers.

- **US National Postdoctoral Association, Washington DC:** Open, with varying membership fees, to any graduate student or postdoctoral researcher from any nation who endorses the association's mission of supporting the postdoctoral experience.

- **UK Research Staff Association, Cambridge:** Any UK early-career researcher can join to interact online, participate in activities or get involved in the advisory group.

- **International Consortium of Research Staff Associations, Cork, Ireland:** Membership is open to early-career researchers who belong to a research-staff association in a member nation.

- **Eurodoc, Brussels:** Members must belong to a research-staff association that represents doctoral candidates and/or junior researchers in a European Union or Council of Europe member state. If their country does not have such a group, researchers may be able to join with observer status. **K.K.**

the gap between developing and developed countries”.

“It's all about extending your networks and building new networks,” says Nicola Woodward, co-chair of the committee of the UK Research Staff Association in Cambridge. “The whole focus is to encourage people to expand.” ■

Karen Kaplan is associate editor of *Nature Careers*.

COLUMN

A good investment

Success involves acknowledging past accomplishments as well as looking ahead to future value, says **Yoshimi Rii**.

When I became the inaugural recipient of a research fellowship this year, my department commemorated the occasion with a ceremony for which they asked me to prepare a ten-minute talk. I was to thank the foundation that funded the fellowship, and describe my research. I have given many talks in my life, but I found myself stumped as to what I should focus on.

“Keep it pretty simple on the science, because they want to know who you are,” the foundation director advised me. I can easily talk for ten minutes about the role of phytoplankton in nutrient cycling, even slipping in some poop jokes, but this time the talk had to focus on me. How was I supposed to reassure the foundation that I deserved its investment while still sounding humble?

I thought about what ‘investment’ really means. Investing involves expectation of future gain. To invest is to believe in potential, and a good investment is gauged by the end result.

The thought of being a good investment riddled me with anxiety. With financial freedom came an ocean of expectations. Was I really worthy of this award, and why? I suddenly feared for my future, wondering whether I would make it in the scientific world and uphold the legacy of oceanographic research. Would the foundation still be proud of me if I did not end up pursuing a postdoc and the conventional route to academia? Would I still be able to call myself a scientist? I am 34. I got married in August, and starting a family was on my mind — and still is. Was it wrong to consider getting pregnant while on this fellowship?

I grew obsessed with what I would become, but it was my present self that had won the fellowship. As I drew up the outline for my talk, I tried to focus on my PhD journey. I thought about being in the right place at the right time, and about the collaborations and the help of many wonderful people that got me here. My ten-minute talk was starting to sound like a list of acknowledgements at the Oscars.

That night, I watched Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook and author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Knopf, 2013), in an interview on the television news programme *60 Minutes*. “Women attribute their success to working hard, luck and help from other people,” she said. “Men will attribute that same success to their own core skills.” Sandberg insisted that the reason



JONATHAN EVANS/GETTY

there are fewer women than men in top leadership roles is that women hold themselves back.

I listened with fascination. I did not see myself as someone who leaned back, but here I was, attributing my fellowship to everyone else and completely anxious about my future job and an imaginary baby.

Empowered by Sandberg's words, I re-evaluated how I should be leaning in with my speech. To move others, I needed to draw on my own inspirations and reflect on why I study the ocean. Most of the time, I am too exhausted, too cynical and too concerned with minute details to take a step back and acknowledge that I am here because I put myself here. But at some point between the sleepless hours at sea and in the lab, I became a person worth investing in. So in my speech, I told the foundation members about my first research cruise 11 years ago, when I threw up for five days straight. I told them how I almost quit grad school when my PhD adviser moved across the continent, and how grateful and honoured I felt to be standing in front of them, supported by my friends and colleagues. Persistence, I felt, is something anyone can relate to — and find worthy of investment.

Pressures and anxieties will always be there. But I learned how important it is, as graduate students and postdocs — and eventually as professors, educators, industry managers and whatever else we hope to be — to focus not only on what we will become, but also on who we are now. ■

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