



Scientists at the New York Academy of Sciences attend a business-techniques course run by SciPHD.

room for improvement at Yale and elsewhere.

Saliha Yilmaz, also a postdoc at Yale, is contemplating a career outside academia. Although she found the postdoc office helpful for nuts-and-bolts support, such as help with polishing her CV, she says that she got much more out of a two-day career development workshop run by the New York Academy of Sciences. She has never paid for career coaching, but says that she is not averse to the idea. “If I was really kind of lost and I needed really close coaching, I would go with it,” she says.

Professional societies also strive to fill the gap. The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology in Bethesda, Maryland, offers careers seminars and personalized CV critiques, and maintains a list of members who provide individual career counselling. The American Chemical Society in Washington DC and the Royal Society of Chemistry in London offer free consultations to members, and the Materials Research Society in Warrendale, Pennsylvania, holds career events at its annual spring and autumn meetings.

PERSONALIZED TECHNIQUES

Those seeking focused one-on-one attention can get it from a careers coach, assuming they have the cash. Edwards helps her clients to improve their CVs, cover letters and interview techniques, as well as to identify their strengths and learn how to best present those to a potential employer. “They come to me because many times they have difficulty articulating their value,” she says. She estimates that she has worked with dozens of scientists in the past 17 years, and all but a couple got a job in their chosen field within a year of hiring her. As for rates, most US coaches charge US\$100–300 per hour, usually for several sessions over a number of months. “It’s expensive, but I was at the point where I needed to

have the success and make the jump and move on,” says Cullen, who says that her investment sharpened her focus and helped her to develop the networking skills and mindset that led to a job offer. “When I got my first pay cheque, my husband said, ‘You know, all the fees you paid for coaching services were recouped with that pay cheque,’” she says.

Finding an effective coach is equivalent to finding any other service provider. Although coaches can become certified, it is not a requirement. Some coaches argue that certification is important, but others say that outcome is the most significant metric. “In my profession, anybody can be a coach, and I would want to know, ‘Show me the results. What have you done?’” Edwards says. Most coaches say that they are happy to let prospective clients talk to previous clients. And often the speakers that US postdoc offices bring in to offer workshops also provide coaching, which can be a good way to learn how they operate. Trade groups for coaches such as the National Career Development Association in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; the International Coach Federation in Lexington, Kentucky; and the Professional Association of Résumé Writers & Career Coaches in St Petersburg, Florida, offer searchable directories on their members, to whom they also sell certification services. In the end, the choice often comes down to whether a client likes the coach’s approach.

Forging a viable science-related career path outside academia is not an easy process, but it need not be a solo endeavour. “It does take work and effort, and in the end, nobody else can do it for you,” says Micoli. “But there are people willing to help.” ■

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TRAINING

Career bank

Biomedical scientists who work outside academia will share information about their careers with the University of California, San Francisco, as part of a programme funded by the US National Institutes of Health. The effort, Motivating Informed Decisions (MIND), aims to educate graduate students and postdocs about non-academic research and career paths. The university plans to recruit a few hundred professionals as MIND volunteers over the next couple of years, says programme manager Elizabeth Silva. “What we hope it will do is expose trainees to careers that they didn’t know about,” she says. Data such as the skills, tasks, and degrees required for a job will be aggregated and anonymized into a resource called the ‘MINDbank’ that could eventually help science trainees throughout the United States.

FUNDING

Spread sparse grants

Some well-funded researchers will soon have one fewer option for getting grants. Starting next year, the National Institute of General Medical Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, will not award large grants to researchers who already have one. The goal is to spread sparse funds across more labs, says institute head Jon Lorsch. He estimates that the policy will free up about 25 grants a year to help launch labs or support ones in danger of closing. “We really want to have as diverse and broad a scientific portfolio as we can,” he says. “Any small amount is going to help the great scientists who are struggling.”

INCLUSIVITY

Mentor matters

Better mentoring could help people from under-represented groups to gain and retain faculty positions. That is the conclusion of interviews of 58 Mexican American, African American, and Puerto Rican faculty members across 22 US research institutions between 2010 and 2012 (R. E. Zambrana *et al. Am. Ed. Res. J.* **52**, 40–72; 2015). More than 25% of those surveyed said that poor mentoring had “very significantly” affected their careers. Study head Ruth Zambrana at the University of Maryland in College Park says that effective mentors value their protégés’ research agendas, help them to expand their networks, offer emotional support and provide ‘political guidance’.