

your larger network — after you've already considered specific jobs, fields, disciplines or sectors that you might want to explore. As soon as you alert those in your network that you're on a job hunt, you can begin to gather information from them. For example, they might be able to tell you which companies and other employers are hiring.

During this period, your network will provide you with job leads and introduce you to people in career fields or organizations that interest you. Arrange informational interviews to learn what it's like working for such companies (see 'Interview tips' and go.nature.com/2jodnzz). Going public about your job search requires delicacy if you are still employed. Be discreet and ask the people you speak with to do likewise. (Bear in mind, however, that it's impossible to keep everything under wraps in today's digital era.)

You should meet face-to-face with people in your network and those to whom they introduce you. It is best to schedule as many of these encounters as you can — including daily lunch dates, even if these are just with a friend. The conversations will be deeper and more candid than a phone or e-mail exchange would be, and you'll gain more support, and more information, from them. And try to not eat alone at your desk every day. Social isolation during this period of uncertainty will only amplify your anxiety.

SEIZE EVERY CHANCE

Eventually, having waded in uncertainty with nothing specific ahead, you will uncover a bona fide job opportunity. Even if the job is far from ideal, I urge you to apply for it and pursue it with conviction. Entering the application process half-heartedly, or with lingering feelings of anger or frustration over your loss, will put you at a disadvantage with your prospective employer because you will make a less favourable impression than other candidates. This application is a crucial first step and will set the tone for others to come. Although you may not receive an offer, the process itself will exercise thought muscles that may have lain dormant for years. You will be a stronger and more polished applicant when future job opportunities arise.

At some point, you might also find yourself in the enviable position of simultaneously considering several desirable job offers. You will be able to mull the pros and cons of each, and to negotiate the best deal with confidence before choosing. At this point, your transition will be complete: the crystal-line structure of your past employment will have been transformed into something new. Congratulations! ■

Peter Fiske is the former chief executive of PAX Water Technologies in Richmond, California, and author of Put Your Science to Work (American Geophysical Union, 2001).

TURNING POINT

Microbe detective



Shruti Naik's stand-up comedy career plans were derailed by glow-in-the-dark bacteria. After watching a TV programme about how bacteria sense each other, Naik decided to study molecular biology and is now a postdoc at the Rockefeller University in New York City. Her research on the skin microbiome contributed to the introduction last year of a US government ban on commercial soaps containing any of 19 different antibacterial chemicals. In the same year, she was named a L'Oréal USA 'For Women in Science' fellow, and she now has plans to start a podcast for female scientists to share their career stories.

Why were you drawn to stand-up comedy?

I moved from India to America when I was 12. It was a culture shock. I dealt with that through humour. It helped to make jokes about the differences in basic communication. It also helped that I went to a high school with a strong arts programme, and I had a theatre teacher who was a stand-up comedian and improvisational performer.

When did you see the video about bacteria?

I was in high school and flipping through channels on TV when I saw Bonnie Bassler, a molecular biologist at Princeton University in New Jersey, talking about glowing bacteria. I just thought it was really cool. I didn't understand what a big deal it was that the microbes behave as multicellular organisms. I took a microbiology class in high school, and was completely hooked on bacteria.

Did you dive into science at university?

Yes. I studied cell and molecular biology at the University of Maryland in College Park. But it wasn't clear to me what basic research was all about, or how exciting and fun it could be. I joined the US Food and Drug Administration lab on campus, where we were essentially

detectives. If there was a food-related disease outbreak in the country, it was our job to find the culprit. It was like 'CSI' for spinach.

Did you go straight for a PhD?

No. I took two years off between undergraduate and graduate school and worked for the Naval Medical Research Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, in a lab that studied immune responses to traumatic brain injury. There, I became interested in immunology. I earned my PhD while researching the dialogue between microbe and host. I give my mentor, Yasmine Belkaid, an immunologist at the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Bethesda, Maryland, so much credit for her unabashed encouragement of my interest in the skin microbiome when others said I was crazy. At the time, most work in the microbiota field focused on the gut. Other bacterial niches — skin, oral cavity and lungs — received little attention.

Why did you choose to research skin?

I think naivety receives most of the credit. There was no rational reason other than I just thought skin was a really cool organ and we knew that bacteria live on skin. But I wanted to know why they were there.

How did your work help lead to a ban on 19 antibacterial chemicals in soap?

It's not like my work said something new that we didn't know about. But we were able to show that the skin has these bacteria, that they are important and that we shouldn't shower ourselves with these products that contribute to antibiotic overuse.

Where are you taking your research now?

I want to learn how tissues experience and respond to environmental stimuli, whether that's nutrition, temperature or inflammatory stress. I'm studying how inflammatory stress affects epidermal stem cells' long-term fitness.

What do you hope to achieve with your podcast?

I want to humanize female scientists and connect younger and older generations. One of the podcasts will feature other L'Oréal-fellowship winners talking about their role models. I want to make these accomplished women more accessible, and to show that everyone has moments of doubt and experiences difficulties. The lesson I hope that women will take away is that self-doubt is normal — just go for it. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.