

A toast to technicians

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Despite the essential support they provide to successful research projects, the contributions of laboratory technicians often remain undervalued. We take a moment to appreciate their efforts.

Laboratory technicians play a crucial role in making research projects successful. The everyday efficiency of a laboratory relies on their active involvement. However, when it comes to telling scientific success stories in research papers, books or the news, their tireless efforts frequently go unacknowledged. Their crucial work is often taken for granted.

The responsibilities of laboratory technicians extend from simply fixing a broken electrical contact to meticulously preparing reagents or calibrating instruments. In addition to their technical skills, laboratory technicians are instrumental in maintaining a safe working environment. Their commitment to health and safety not only ensures the wellbeing of everyone in the laboratory but also safeguards research equipment and data. Their versatility allows researchers to concentrate on the conceptual aspects of their work and on the smooth execution of their experiments, knowing that many technical problems are in capable hands.

The contribution of technicians is particularly apparent at large-scale facilities such as the Large Hadron Collider, various photon, neutron and muon sources, and space observatories. These state-of-the-art facilities demand a level of specialist technical expertise beyond that needed in an ordinary laboratory environment. Laboratory technicians



are not only responsible for troubleshooting complex technical problems but also play a key role in upgrading these instruments for future use.

Beyond keeping laboratories running smoothly, technicians are instrumental in training the next generation of scientists. Their active participation in developing the technical skills of researchers by offering hands-on expertise in instrumentation and best practices should not be forgotten.

There is no doubt that the success of a research laboratory depends on interactions between the entire team – principal investigators, researchers and technicians. This close collaboration creates a positive atmosphere in which ideas can be freely exchanged, eventually leading to new discoveries. And yet, it is rare to see technicians' names in the author list of research publications or in the acknowledgements section – or even on group websites to acknowledge them as part of the team.

Although there may be good reasons to restrict an author list to research scientists, it is not acceptable that the crucial contributions of technicians frequently go entirely unnoticed. Any research endeavour is a collaborative effort, and laboratory technicians

are integral contributors, who deserve recognition.

Acknowledging the efforts of laboratory technicians can take many forms. Adding their names to group websites and the acknowledgements section of papers would be a start. Depending on the level of their involvement, inclusion in the author list may also be justified. Beyond the recognition from the research groups they directly work with, departments, funding bodies and professional societies can specifically celebrate the achievements of laboratory technicians. For example, the Optica Foundation has launched the [Photonics Workforce Scholarship](#), which recognizes promising trainee technicians in the photonics community. It would be great if more organizations followed their example.

These days, research groups often publicize their work on social media. Thanking the laboratory technicians and mentioning their contributions in such posts would be a small step in the right direction. Furthermore, acknowledging their crucial support in conference talks and posters, along with other group members, would be a small but welcome token of appreciation.

Recognizing and valuing the contributions of laboratory technicians to research projects and in training future scientists is important. Expressing gratitude where it is due and promoting an environment that values all contributors can lay the foundation for a more collaborative and sustainable future for research. While applauding scientific achievements, don't forget the silent support system that makes them possible.

Published online: 14 February 2024