Cultivating a Reputation Within Your Research Community

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first, do good work

- Carry out research of the highest quality to answer significant questions which are both fundamentally interesting and relevant to national needs (health, energy, etc.) and publish this research in high impact journals.
- Then, …

finding your research community

Many “tribes” of researchers who should be familiar with your work, with whom you have overlap in various categories, for example:

Research methodology, e.g., NMR, mass spectroscopy, single crystal diffraction …

Physical system, e.g., zeolites, polymers, catecholamines, lipids, …

Applications, e.g., fuel cells, solar fuels, catalysis, malaria, tuberculosis drug development,…

Processes, e.g., drug metabolism, chromosome dynamics, coastal ocean circulation, high temperature corrosion,…

Subfield, e.g., bioorganic chemistry, glycobiology,…

maintain networks in various categories

- Even when your research heavily involves technique/method development using a particular type of instrumentation, consider networking not only in research methodology, but also in the other categories: physical systems, processes, applications, and the subfield to which your research belongs.

which conferences?

- Conferences may be centered around a subfield, a research methodology, a physical system, specific processes, a class of applications, etc.
- Each of these venues offers possibilities for cultivating individuals who may be your competitors, who may be collaborators, who could become interested in your work.
- There are potential reviewers of your manuscripts and proposals, potential evaluators of your tenure/promotion, potential nominators for awards, etc. among the participants.

attending the same annual conference

- advantage: that research community will get to know you well; eventually you will be organizing symposia/sessions in that conference, will become an officer of the professional society, etc.
- disadvantage: may be too restricted a research community for your career development

consider reaching other audiences

- For example, individuals using solid state NMR include those working on proteins, semiconductors, polymers, bone, inorganic solids, metal-organic frameworks, amyloid plaques, clays, nanoporous materials,… If you are working on nanoporous materials using NMR, you may consider not only this conference, but also solid state chemistry, flow and transport in permeable media, environmental sciences, catalysis, bioanalytical sensors, atomic and molecular interactions, chemical reactions at surfaces, dynamics at surfaces, and so on…

expand your sphere of influence

- Be alert to possible applications of your work, even when your research is very fundamental or theoretical in nature.
- Consider giving posters, if not talks, in conferences where the audience is mixed.
- When visiting other institutions, be genuinely interested in the research of the colleagues of your host.
- Sign up to talk to departmental seminar speakers, make an effort to understand their research.
- Maintain contacts with individuals in your professional network (exchanging pdfs of recent publications is a good idea), and ask to be introduced to other contacts of those individuals.
- Call your friends at other universities and offer to give a talk.

promote accessible versions of your work

- Maintain an attractive and comprehensive website; this is your face to the world. Update in terms of your research interests, recent discoveries, and publications.
- Contact your university public relations office for an interview and news release. An upcoming paper in Science, Cell, PNAS, Nature, or Phys. Rev. Letters, for example, or an announcement of a sizable grant is a good excuse to discuss your research at a level accessible to the general public.
- Send research nuggets to your program officer at NSF, some of them get posted on the NSF web site under the tab “Discoveries”. A 5000-character newspaper style description with attractive graphics and video clips help! See http://www.nsf.gov/discoveries/
- Some research groups prepare videos to show in YouTube, as well as in to their lab home page.

accessible versions of your work

- serve as recruiting tools for undergraduate, graduate students and post-docs
- serve as primary information to members of your department and university who are not in your field
- serve as introductory material for future collaborators
- serve as primary information to members of your audience when visiting other institutions (most of them will not read your original articles)
- serves to extend your research network to those whose technical expertise overlaps only minimally with yours, but are potentially useful sponsors and allies.

be a good citizen in the profession

- do thorough, prompt reviews of manuscripts, the editors will remember this
- do thorough reviews of proposals in panels or study sections, the program officer and the panel members will remember this
- prepare and deliver good presentations in all venues. In the audience may be a prospective grad student or post-doc, a future collaborator, a referee of your paper or proposal, an evaluator of your tenure/promotion papers. As an academic, you are always on!

cultivate international contacts

- attend/present at international conferences
- maintain contacts with individuals, exchange pdfs of your recent work with colleagues outside the US
- spend your sabbatical years in highly respected laboratories outside the US
- invite international colleagues to visit your lab before or after they attend a conference in the US
- visit colleagues when attending conferences in their country
- help out organizing committees of international conferences