Postdoc Academic Chat #8

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING IN ACADEMIA

Tuesday, May 9, 2017

Questions/Discussion Items to Consider

***** What 2-3 specific things can you do now as postdoc to start networking beyond Stanford/

* Who among the faculty you know at Stanford seem particularly good at forming productive alliances and what can you learn from them?

* Based on the readings below, what 1-2 things would you NOT want to do in your first year as a professor?

Readings

#1 Collegiality: The Tenure Track's Pandora's Box
#2 Helping to Foster Collegiality for Newcomers
#3 "Alliancing" - A New Way to Look at Academic Networking

#1 Collegiality: The Tenure Track's Pandora's Box

The posting below gives some great tips on developing collegial relationships with your colleagues. It is by Mary McKinney, Ph.D. of Successful Academic Coaching and it appeared in the June 6 and June 13, 2005 issue of The Successful Academic News. Please visit Mary's web site at http://www.successfulacademic.com for additional tenure track tips and dissertation writing strategies. © 2000-07 Mary McKinney, Ph.D. - All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

If you are a junior faculty member, you have a good sense of how high the tenure bar is set. Publishing, teaching and service - you know where you stand in these areas. However, there is an elusive, unquantifiable fourth component in the promotion and tenure equation: collegiality. How are you doing in that arena? Are you respected? Seen as a "team player?" Generally well-liked?

Bottom line: do your colleagues want you around for the foreseeable future?

If you are a graduate student or post-doc, it is never too early to begin learning the rules of collegiality and paying attention to the culture and politics of your department. You know (or have heard about) people whose tenure battles have been won or lost on the basis of popularity.

Collegiality is the Pandora's box in the room at the tenure vote.

A few weeks ago, an assistant professor called me for a coaching consultation after his third-year annual review. During the review process he'd expected to talk about his teaching and publication record; his Chair's main criticisms caught him completely off guard.

"People don't feel like they know you," she said. "You're seen as being rather un-engaged and peripheral to the department."

The gist of her advice was that he needed to become better known and liked by his colleagues, because he wasn't viewed as a member of the team. He was completely taken aback: he'd never expected he'd be told to schmooze.

"What should I do?" my new client asked me. "I never thought that tenure might depend on having lots of lunch dates."

Here's what I told him: Lunch dates are important. And succeeding politically is based on two factors: common sense and self-control. Exercise both.

Practicing common sense and self-control requires several tactics. When I started to list tips I came up with 16 - way too many for one newsletter. So here's the first installment of six tips.

1) Remember that whiners are boring. You don't need to be falsely cheery, but keep your complaints to a minimum. Nod sympathetically when people complain to you, but don't play the "I've got it even harder than you" game. Everyone is busy, and most people are overwhelmed. Who needs to hear about it?

2) Walk the walk. Pay conscious attention to the image you want to project: mature, eager, curious and calm are good traits to start with. If you cultivate your sense of humor you're more likely to be popular. Anxiety, anger, desperation and insecurity are unappealing traits.

3) Get to know your colleagues by asking for advice. Most people love giving advice (take me, for example). You're not expected to know everything already. Ask your senior colleagues for suggestions about successfully navigating academia. What tips do they have for teaching, publishing, time management, negotiating departmental politics?

4) Get to know your colleagues by getting to know their work. This is an important

and under-utilized strategy. Getting good feedback in academia happens much less frequently than it should, and everyone craves credit for their efforts. Read your colleagues' work and let them know that you understand and appreciate their contributions. They will respond gratefully if you provide thoughtful responses and sincere praise. Be specific with your compliments. For example, say "I really liked your new article in Journal X. Your ideas about Y made me think about my own work on Z."

5) Do invite people out to lunch (unless you're just starting your first year - in which case wait a month or two and see who takes the initiative to invite you out on the 'first date'). Because you've read their work - you have read their work, haven't you? You can ask them informed and interesting questions. Remember that lunch has gone well if your colleague has done the vast
majority of the talking.

6) Don't make enemies with important people. This is the most important rule and it can be very difficult to follow. In the mystery novel "The Titian Committee," author Iain Pears describes his character Professor Roberts in the following way: "He was a man who had learned early in life that you cannot arrange matters so that everybody loves you simultaneously. That being the case, the best you can do is to ensure that those who dislike you can do you no harm." Relate well!

Likeability is important, of course, from your first day in graduate school until your promotion to full professor. Did professors want to chair your dissertation and serve on your committee? Did they write the glowingly inflated letters of recommendation that are de rigueur nowadays? Did they place that quick phone call to a friend on the hiring committee and sing your praises?

If you got the job, you probably had your doctoral program faculty rooting for you to succeed. The attitude of an eager, appreciative and promising acolyte probably comes naturally to you. However, now that you're a faculty member, your stance needs to change. Your role is no longer that of a promising student but of a talented junior Here are ten more tips to add to last week's first six pointers:

7) Mom was right: if you can't say something nice don't say it at all. Gossip may get you in trouble. Listen, but don't contribute, to colleague-bashing. Take mom's advice and keep mum.

8) Be a good listener. The rules of collegiality are similar to the rules of dating. A conversation has gone well when the other person has done most of the talking. Don't confide secrets and antipathies until you know which colleagues are completely trustworthy and discrete (and this can take years). A good rule of thumb is to reveal no more than is revealed to you. Don't spill your guts too early. Take this advice one step further, and strive to be your colleagues' confidant (without getting caught in the middle of turf wars and popularity struggles.) Over time, people will share sensitive information with you when you listen empathetically and keep secrets confidential.

It's good to know sensitive information.

9) Give positive feedback publicly. Sometimes, make your concrete, focused compliments in front of a third party (such as right before a faculty meeting begins). Remember tip number four about reading your colleagues' work? After reading their latest articles, you're planning to share specific, appreciative comments. Make them public when appropriate. There's no need to fawn - you're letting your colleagues know the ways in which their work has an impact on your thinking. People will sniff out an apple-polishing fake, so make sure that any praise is genuine. Congratulate peers for winning awards, getting grants, and other successes. Gracious self-confidence is appealing.

10) Seek out mentors. Everyone longs for expert guidance and it is clear that the careers of academics with devoted mentors proceed more smoothly. Finding a mentor is more likely to happen if you're reaching out via your practice of collegiality. Don't expect an uber-mentor: it is more likely that guidance will come from many sources in a variety of forms. One member of your department will explain the history of the political divisions within the department (the theorists vs. the methodologists; the empirical vs. the qualitative researchers, etc.). Another may be willing to read your manuscripts (and you should jump at this opportunity).

11) Find a likeable side of everyone. Look for things you like and respect about your colleagues - even if you have to dig deep to find something appealing. People like people who like them. Even the strident curmudgeon with detestable politics may be a dog-lover or know a great lasagna recipe.

12) Leave your door open. Friendly availability is highly valued in most departments. Avoid campus when you need to write, and reserve tasks that require less focus for your office. Check your email in the department, then escape with your laptop for an hour of rough drafting. It's a good sign when people stick their heads in to chat, so stop looking at your watch.

13) Don't talk too much at meetings. Everyone respects those wise souls whose group comments are thoughtful, occasional and succinct. If there are 10 people at the meeting, make sure that you speak less than one tenth of the time. Ask good questions. Don't pontificate. Most rational humans hate meetings; so don't make them longer than necessary.

14) Make friends. If you're lucky, you'll develop one or two true friends in the department, folks with whom you can share your frustrations and anxieties. However, it is important to seek out friends who are outside the 'family' – especially if it is dysfunctional. It takes time and effort to make friends outside the University, but it is essential to your mental health. Make it a priority to join a yoga class, running group, pottery course or another activity you feel like you don't have time to pursue.

15) Don't get angry: get tenure. If your department is a deep and venom-filled snake

pit, suck it up or get out. One of my clients with a prestigious position is coping with a batch of particularly arrogant and narcissistic colleagues. She uses me as her outlet for complaints and co-strategist for political battles. Having a ventilation system helps her stay focused on her work. We spend some of our time fantasizing about the stinging retorts she'll give once she has tenure. We spend time planning her fifth year job hunt. She's started a diary to collect her most outrageous stories of these professors' perfidy. A truly horrid department is a good reason to look for another job sooner rather than later, no matter how prestigious your program or the university.

16) Finally, realize that no one can follow all these rules! We all show bad judgment, make social gaffes and occasionally lose our self-control. Moving on after mistakes, rather than obsessing endlessly, is one of the hallmarks of a successful academic. You can do it!

#2 Helping to Foster Collegiality for Newcomers

The excerpt below is from: The Department Chair's Role in Developing New Faculty Into Teachers and Scholars, by Estela Mara Bensimon, Kelly Ward, Karla Sanders, Anker Publishing Company, Inc. Bolton, MA (pp. 123-25). In it, Professor Anna Neumann of Michigan State University, offers advice to department chairs on helping newcomers develop a greater sense of colleagueship, a term with a different meaning than collegiality. Copyright 2000 by Anker Publishing Company, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

A Letter from Professor Anna Neumann

Collegiality is a much misunderstood word, and the expectations it raises, while admirable, can be unrealistic. Collegiality, in its conventional use, refers to the ideals of faculty life-professors collectively and harmoniously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, the crafting of curriculum, and the planning of teaching programs. While the inhabitants of this idealized world don't always agree, they rely on reasoned discussion with peers and sage advice from "elders" to resolve the differences of opinion that emerge. Consensus rules in this collegial world.

I would argue that wishes for collegiality are, for the most part, just wishes, and that collegiality, while remaining an important ideal in academe is just that. In real life, professors are more likely to strive for collegiality than to achieve it. While collaboration exists, so does strife, an aspect of faculty life that the word "collegiality" does not pick up very well. To describe faculty relations as faculty members experience them-helpful, hurtful, and inconsequential-I prefer the word colleagueship because it brings forth both positive and negative aspects of faculty relations. Collegiality focuses mostly on the positive that we wish for.

But if we take the word colleagueship as our point of departure, what do we see? And what arc the implications of what we see for department chairs working with pre-tenure

faculty? Let me reiterate: Colleagueship, as I'm using it, refers to the range of relationships that may exist among professors-from friendship to contentiousness, from close and regular engagement to alienation, and everything in between. If you're a department chair who would like to enhance new faculty members' experiences of colleagueship, what might you do? Let me begin with some perspectives.

First, when junior faculty enter an institution and department for the first time, they are entering a web of well-established (though sometimes shifting) relationships, some positive, some negative, others neutral. These new faculty are, in essence, strangers-formally in the door of the department, yet outside the ebb and flow of its internal, colleague-based relationships. This colleagueship, whatever its quality, is, for the most part, not reflected in the university's bureaucratic structure, including its departments. For example, that a group of people belong to a particular department does not mean they agree, understand, support, or even know each other or each others work. A new faculty member, especially one just out of graduate school, may be unaccustomed to-even unaware of-the ambiguity and discord of departmental life.

Second, a new faculty member is likely to be engaged in the crafting of her or his scholarly agenda, including the program of work that will inform her/his research and reaching for years to come. This person is probably learning in the best sense of the word. The relationships that she or he forms in the new department are likely to affect that learning, and importantly, what she or he becomes as a scholar and teacher. Thus while the new professor's scholarly values and interests arc central to her/his work, the colleagueship that this person finds herself or himself in can be very formative. For these reasons, the colleague-based relationships that a new faculty member makes-or stumbles into-can be crucial. How might department chairs help? Here are some thoughts derived from my own writing on this subject.

1) Introductions and announcements that a new colleague has arrived are never enough. Help a new faculty member make substantive connections to campus-based colleagues who are working in areas related to the newcomer's expertise and/or interests. This is something you, as chair, should consider doing continuously for the newcomer during her/his early years on campus. For one thing, the new faculty member's interests may just be emerging, or it may take you a while to understand those interests in relation to the work that others on campus do. Inform established colleagues about the newcomer's interests in ways that will help them see the connections to their own work. Such links are not always immediately obvious.

2) Provide opportunities for junior faculty members to get to know each other as colleagues and friends. While competitiveness does sometimes grow among untenured peers, this need not be the case. The friendship that grows among junior faculty can grow into good colleagueship in the middle and senior years of their careers. Actively discourage competitiveness. One way to do this is to evaluate peers only in reference to their own accomplishments and not in comparison to each other. Another suggestion is to emphasize publicly the unique identities of junior faculty-for example, as reflected in their work-as opposed to speaking of them in ways that make them appear

interchangeable. This is particularly important when the peers themselves are different from the majority of their senior colleagues-for example, two women or two ethnic minorities in a traditionally all-male department. While emphasizing the uniqueness of individuals, you might simultaneously applaud their efforts to work together in reaching, research, curriculum development, or other projects.

3) Introduce new faculty to departmental colleagues, but don't stop here. Help them get to know colleagues with related interests in other departments as well.

4) While junior faculty are often advised to avoid excessive committee commitments, some committee service that brings new professors into contact with other faculty (who might become future collaborators) can be a good thing. Help the new faculty member choose committee service that makes sense. But consider the other side of the coin as well: Discourage the newcomer's service on committees that are excessively politically entangled or that may draw the newcomer (unknowingly) into longstanding difficulties. However, alerting the newcomer about those difficulties is not a bad idea. Some department chairs may believe they are shielding newcomers by not talking to them about the politics of the new setting. Chances are that if a newcomer doesn't hear about departmental and institutional troubles (including feuds and alliances) from a senior colleague, she or he will learn about them the hard way-by falling into them.

5) Be aware that a new faculty member is stepping into a stream of institutional conversation-institutional meaning-that has been in progress for a long time. Be prepared to help the newcomer decipher words and deeds that make little or no sense to her or him. I wish you, and those to whom your handbook is addressed, my best as you-and they-continue in efforts to illuminate and humanize the experiences of new faculty.

Sincerely,

Anna Neumann Associate Professor Michigan State University

Reading #3 "Alliancing" - A New Way to Look at Academic Networking

The excerpt below is from a an excellent article, "Alliances Through Networking: It Is Not Rocket Science," by Jaleh Daie. Although written for a science audience, there is very little in it that does not apply to all areas of academia. The full article appears in, The Scientist, Vol:12, #22, p. 13, November 9, 1998, and can be accessed at: http://www.the-scientist.library.upenn.edu/yr1998/nov/opin_981109.html
Excerpt By Jaleh Daie (Copyright © 1998 *The Scientist, Inc.)*

The truth is that most of us in science and technology feel squeamish about the idea of networking. Yet, knowingly or unknowingly, successful scientists always have been integral parts of several networks. That is how one is invited to give talks, write reviews and articles, or serve on prestigious bodies; it also is how one is nominated for top awards and honors and invited or selected to consider plum assignments and positions. To some,

the notion of networking is a bit uncomfortable, but this is because it is misunderstood as exploitative, not mutually beneficial and cooperative. Realistically, networking is a two-way street. It is both collaborative and reciprocal. The main goal of networking should be to develop meaningful relationships that benefit all participants. If that does not happen, the relationships will not manifest as positive forces and will not last.

Networking is about doing unto people as you want them to do unto you. Rather than saying, "How do I get X to do Y for me?", the right attitude is, "How can I help X?" Good and effective networking is about being considerate and courteous to everyone, not just those who are at the top at a given moment.

Networking is work. It is not just a gratuitous concept. It requires time, energy, enthusiasm, sincerity, and consideration. To get a foot in the door, a top education and talent are needed, but moving up is predicated on connections, on people who know that you are a talented performer. When filling positions, it is quite natural for people to look for candidates through their own networks, seeking individuals they know can do the job, or who are able to recommend good people from their own networks.

Networking is about developing communities within which common interests are shared, information is exchanged and shared, and mutual help is given. Your network includes not only your own personal and professional contacts; it extends to those people's contacts and networks. The novice networker may harbor the misguided notion of having a lot of acquaintances, but real networking is about relationships.

Recently, I've been hearing people use the term "alliancing." Although ungrammatical, this word is useful in subtly redefining the concept of networking by emphasizing its strategic side--the building of a few, meaningful, and strong relationships or allies. To have a strong relationship means being able to count on someone, and someone being able to count on you. The main purpose of alliancing is to seek and nurture individuals who can be advisers, sounding boards, intellectual and social resources, role models, mentors, and friends with whom joys and disappointments can be shared.

Alliancing is an effective approach, because the aim is to develop relationships with a few people who can be counted on, rather than simply generating an overflowing Rolodex. Alliancing (or networking, for that matter) is not a numbers game, and should not be about superficial meetings and insincere platitudes. Nor is it about sheer visibility without credibility, which can be deadly to professional goals. One must be willing to consistently deliver what is promised. It is not necessary to do great and significant things to nurture the network. Small things do count. On the other hand, networking is like doing math. A small, early infraction can derail you. To be truly successful, your antennas must be up all the time, but keep in mind that this does not mean being superficially alert. Like many people, I dread the sight of "human butterflies" with nanosecond attention spans, who collect and give tens of business cards during the cocktail hour, or those who offer the NutraSweet version of affection to people they perceive as useful to their agenda. You can get by only so far with charm alone. Then you have to deliver. In fact, few things turn me off more than "professional networkers," who

are attentive only to the "powerful and highly placed," but who look past those they do not consider to be important.

Underestimating and disregarding the junior people or those without impressive titles is the hallmark of phonies, and you can spot them from a mile away. This is not to say that, as a rule, touching base with as many people as possible should be avoided. There is a right time, place, and manner in which to do so. But in many situations, it is far more rewarding and enriching to meet a few interesting people, learn what they do, how they do it, and discover if there is a convergence of interests. True and successful networkers treat everybody with sincerity, courtesy, and dignity, knowing that good manners buy good will. People are like the stock market. You never know who will be up and who will be down the next day. Taking the long view, giving everyone her or his due, is the best way to build a real network and to ensure that things will fall in place for you.