Career Dos and Donts

Navigating an Aging Research Career

Stephanie Studenski

September 2016
Agenda

• Your Science
• Communications
• Management and Negotiations
• Survival in changing times
Your Science:
the conceptual framework

✓ Connects ideas; mechanisms, outcomes, cofactors and modifiers

✓ A graphic illustration of your science

✓ Explains what is known, gaps, your aims or findings

✓ Orient the consumer of your proposal or manuscript or talk

✓ Build and modify as your research and the field progress
Your Science: Feedback

• We are all blind to gaps and assumptions in our own work
• Seek critical feedback: what is not clear, assumptions, missing links, gaps
• Seek to give feedback to others; sharpens your understanding of communications
• Welcome feedback but don’t let it psych you out…Persistence wins!!
Communications

• Your work appears stronger and has greater impact when you communicate clearly
• How to write clearly: try the Gopen way (writing from the reader’s perspective, sequence concepts from old to new, keep the action in the verb)
• Use high impact visuals in talks and documents
• Keep the focus on the take-home message

The Science of Scientific Writing

If the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader needs

George D. Gopen and Judith A. Swan
Management

Academia and other large organizations have Byzantine and often hidden regulations and perverse incentives so you must learn the rules of the game

✓ Seek mentorship by a smart, experienced administrator
✓ Learn the HR game (job descriptions, interviewing, references)
✓ Understand how budgeting works in your place (interpretable reports, accounting practices, advanced planning)

Keep track of what is going on
✓ Plan data management in advance and monitor
✓ Be hands-on up front and periodically
Smart Negotiations

• If you don’t ask, you won’t get it..
• Know what you want (not just a raise in salary…)
• Make your request feasible and desirable for decision makers
  ✓ Earn it before you ask: plan and discuss in advance
  ✓ Describe how your request is good for the organization
  ✓ Provide a clear plan for needed resources
• If you want to evaluate your value on the market, be prepared to follow through
Academic Medicine

A house of cards in the 21st Century?

• Where we came from:
  ➢ Clinical and federal research revenue improved academic flexibility to promote growth dependent on “soft money”

• Where we are:
  ➢ As clinical and research revenue are squeezed, Medical Schools have few other resources to support their large faculty
  ➢ It is no longer realistic to expect a large faculty to be self-supporting
  ➢ Standards of “independent investigator” no longer realistic
  ➢ The old career success strategies seem poorly fitted to current environment
Academic Medicine
A house of cards in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century?

• Where we are headed:
  ➢ Medical School faculty size at risk to shrink
  ➢ The current leadership are largely aging boomers—expect rapid turnover in the coming decade or sooner
  ➢ Other than austerity budgets, academic leadership is not yet planning for the future

You are our investment in the future of aging research
  ➢ How can you thrive?
  ➢ How can we help you?
The future of (aging) research

- Increasingly focused on funder priorities: RFA, RFP, PA etc
- Successful research is often more large-scale, making less room for small independent research programs
- PCORI and CMS-based in health systems with IT
- Young or midstage investigators need to develop a national reputation to become recognized as qualified to serve as PI of large studies

The shrinking of the “lone ranger” autonomous small research lab
The evolution of a “company player” corporate/bureaucratic research infrastructure
Solutions

• Grow from inside a network:
  - NIH translational or clinical trials or Program Project research: get into a successful group or network
  - Get involved with a healthcare system with good IT (become knowledgeable about IT)
  - Leverage to autonomy: ancillary proposals based in big studies

• Go the old way toward independence
  - Work at NIH
  - Propose <500k/year basic or mechanistic human studies with minimal confounding; “clean”
  - Try “two chronic condition” human studies
  - Do preclinical/early translation drug development

• All: still need to understand your game, the players (program, reviewers), need a coach familiar with the inside
The great opening coming your way

- Boomers currently dominate senior research positions
- Because they are well established, they are key to current successful funding of big studies
- Boomers are increasingly likely to step back or move on in the coming decade
- Makes room for you to advance or evolve toward more leadership roles...
The new way: What can you do?

• Get inside large studies and networks as co-I or subproject leader
• Develop expertise in needed areas: novel molecular techniques, translational technologies, IT, computer modeling
• Prove yourself to your leaders with your responsibility, initiative, creativity; earn advancing responsibility and position
• Write ancillary studies and try for modest free add-ons
• Analyze and publish based on data from large studies
• Build your local and national reputation so you can be considered qualified for advanced responsibilities
What can we boomers do?

• Commit to intentional and thoughtful *succession planning*
• Facilitate evolving responsibility and visibility for high potential emerging leaders
• Plan for transitions from current national positions that are helpful for tenure and promotion among emerging leaders eg make room for new appointments to editorial boards, professional societies, study sections; perhaps with coaching
• Appoint emerging leaders as unofficial co-PI for “leadership training” without loss of new PI NIH benefit
• Serve as co-I and coach for first PI applications
• Let go, step down and give someone else a chance!!!