COMMUNICATING YOUR SCIENCE - A PROFESSIONAL NECESSITY!

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Overall Message:

Communicating your work to the public is important for your career, your university and the entire field of science!

Background:

Researchers are taught how to communicate their work to other researchers using facts.

Few research scientists have received training in communicating science to the public* in a way that is clear, concise, credible, compelling, and told as a story!

*Public audiences include: university administrators, employers, colleagues in other disciplines, legislators, news media, funding agencies, donors/philanthropists, students, family and friends.

Poor communication with the public is hurting science and scientists:

- Lost jobs, promotions, recognition
- Lost funding
- Poor teaching
- Inability to have impact on society
- Anti-science becomes credible

Scientists who can communicate their work are better:

- Scientists
- University representatives
- Teachers
- Influencers of public legislation (including research budgets)

Reasons for reluctance in acquiring communication skills:

- No time... too busy
- No encouragement from administrators or mentors
- Perceived as self promotion
Make communication training an integral part of your career development!

Learn the various forms of communication: (see Resources below)
- Verbal/Oral
- Non-verbal/non-oral (body language)
- Visual design
- Written

Become proficient in key communication skills:
- Short (Elevator) pitch
- Job interview talks
- Audience specific messages
- Storytelling techniques
- Graphics and visualizations
- Vocal and non-vocal (body language) skills

Elevator Pitch:
- Can only take 30-60 seconds!
- Usually contains a powerful, memorable statement
- Pique interest – encourage more questions

4 Parts to an Elevator Pitch:
1. Say something about yourself
2. Talk about your work
3. What makes you unique
4. Describe your goal

Stories have power and impact:
- Great way to talk about yourself and your work
- Explains what happened over time
- Not meant to tell everything
- Intended to elicit emotion
- Stories teach, inspire and result in action
- Kill the curse of knowledge
- Tend to defuse an argument or silence a critic

Storytelling:
- Talk about obstacles, discoveries/breakthroughs, collaborations
- Don’t make it too long...condense to only 1-2 main points
- Begin with happy face ... look interested! (Good body language!)
• Add points of interest about your research using mystery, disgust, shock, etc.
• Explain why YOU care about this research
• What obstacles did YOU have to overcome?
• What’s YOUR goal and why is it important to the listeners?
• End your story before the listeners gets bored...watch their body language
• Ask the listeners for their opinions and comments!

Find opportunities to talk to, write to and be seen by the public.
• Meet with the public (e.g., science cafes, high schools, club meetings)
• Write articles about your work for the public.
• When appropriate, meet with donors and potential donors.
• When appropriate, give news interviews.
• When appropriate, meet with legislators.
• Use your new communication skills in the classroom as well as at conferences.

Communication Resources:

• Mentor/Advisor
• Really good science speakers
• Communications Office
• Advocacy and Outreach Office
• Courses and Workshops
• Formal Speaking Groups – e.g., Toastmasters
• Informal Speaking Groups – e.g., Get together with friends at lunchtime
• Professional Coach

Websites:
• American Association for the Advancement of Science: Communicating Science Tools
• Burroughs Welcome: Communicating Science – Giving Talks
• COMPASS. (...dedicated to helping scientists connect themselves and their science to the wider world)

Resource Books:
• Anne Lamott. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life.* 1995
• Dennis Meredith. *Explaining Research: How to Reach Key Audiences to Advance Your Work.* 2010
• Philip Bernardi. *Improvisation Starters.* 1992
• Randy Olson. *Don't Be Such a Scientist: Talking Substance in an Age of Style.* 2009

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