



AWIS-PHI “New Year New Tools for your Job Search”

February 8, 2011

Summary by Arati S. Kreibich, Ph.D.

The February meeting of AWIS-Philadelphia Chapter began with dinner and an opportunity for mingling and informal networking. The good turnout for this event, described as a “discussion on job searching with a panel of recruiting experts,” indicated the timeliness of the topic. The formal event began with a hybrid discussion and question and answer period with the experts. The panelists were Annette Baron, MBA, President, Eagle Research, Inc. Colleen Hamilton, BA, Executive Director, Life Science Career Alliance, and Linda Resnick, MS, Founder & President, CEO Resources, Inc., and author of *A Big Splash in a Small Pond*.

The attendees were first polled on how many were in a “transitioning” period in their careers. Most attendees indicated that this was the case. Yet when asked how many had an “action plan” to make the transition, only one person indicated that she did. This revealed a basic lack of knowledge in trying to apply for jobs, especially in a non-academic environment. The panelists informed the audience that most people change careers up to three times and positions six to eight times in their working life. The key to successful transitions lies in a basic plan: 1) find a passion; 2) know yourself and how to present yourself and 3) craft a good resume. Indeed, writing a resume can be used as a tool to 4) figure out where you would like to go. The ensuing freeform discussion with lots of personal anecdotes and examples from the panelists and attendees revealed strategies to fulfill the four steps of the plan.

To find one’s passion, the panelists suggested self-analysis first by listing what one has liked and disliked in the positions held and experiences had thus far. Ms. Resnick suggested asking friends to describe how they see you and reconciling the two versions in order to gain insight. Finally panelists thought that being open to and exploring different experiences and types of careers were also beneficial in gaining perspective.

To find out what types of academic or especially non-academic opportunities abound, the panelists suggested informational interviewing and networking. Resources for informational interviewing include internet research to find out more about companies and job responsibilities as well as social networking. Ms. Baron stated that sites similar to Monster.com

have a 7% success rate while job searching, but social networking can yield 18-30% success rates. Therefore, making good use of these resources is critical for job searching in the current market. An example of this was using LinkedIn, the professional social networking site in various ways. One might use LinkedIn to reach out to one's own or others' contacts or to participate in society and special interest groups, including AWIS-PHL and the national AWIS groups. In addition, one can search for certain "buzzwords" on LinkedIn in order to find inspiring companies or interesting types of jobs. Another excellent suggestion was to use alumni associations and their listservs to find people with similar job titles or who work in companies one might be interested in pursuing. Finally, one can also use professional society networks (for example, AWIS or Society for Neuroscience members' list) to find people who work in industry or in non-academic positions. The panelists suggested keeping a spreadsheet with contact names, details and topics discussed, etc., in order to keep on task. Importantly, they said to reach out to people at all levels in a company.

Networking, either through social media or more old-fashioned means, gives one a leg up on the job search. This "coming alive" as a person, Ms. Baron mentioned, increases your chances of getting the job by about 20%. The next step, after being recognized as a possible candidate, is the presentation of one's resume. As Ms. Resnick disclosed, one must be aware that a resume is a marketing tool. The panelists cautioned that a resume is not equivalent to a curriculum vitae (CV). While the latter is a list of all accomplishments, the former is a concise document summarizing your pertinent accomplishments and should be tailored to each job. Ms. Hamilton specified that when recruiting for pharmaceutical companies for example, she looked for specifics of accomplishments in a resume, including project organization and the ability to think outside the box. When recruiting for smaller biotech companies, Ms. Hamilton revealed that she frequently looked for someone who "exceeded goals on a limited budget" or was enthusiastic and proactive. The panelists disclosed that the culture at various companies diverged typically in terms of the size of the company. For example, bigger pharmaceutical companies may be more hierarchical and "lock-step" whereas smaller companies may allow for more flexibility in duties as well as increased rewards for initiative.

The panelists and participants discussed several ways of increasing the qualifications for scientists to transition away from the bench. They recommended reflecting on one's abilities, not just skill sets, in order to gain more insight to transferable qualifications for non-academic positions. For example, one may be able to leverage analytical and quantitative skills. Obtaining help in crafting a good resume geared towards a more general audience, especially for those considering a non-academic career track, was also suggested. In addition, panelists suggested volunteering or taking classes in your desired field. All panelists agreed that an MBA was not necessary for an extra-academic job; however showing leadership and/or management abilities was crucial. A last recommendation was to transition laterally from the bench to a smaller

company and then to advance in a stepwise fashion. Since smaller companies have fewer resources, one may be able to gain more experience and then transition to a more advanced position there or elsewhere.

A good resume, while essential to getting the interview, will only contribute about 30% to getting the job, according to Ms. Baron. “Personality, chemistry and fit” comprise the remaining 70%, making the interview the most important part of the job search. The most important things while interviewing included the basics: promptness, neat and clean appearance, firm handshake and a good demeanor. Besides these general rules, the panelists advised that one should be “authentic” and “passionate” and “tell a story” in the interview. All panelists agreed that asking questions that showed interest in the organization was vital, while Ms. Resnick cautioned that since the types of questions asked reflect what one cares about, one needs to be judicious in choosing them.

An important theme for this informative meeting was the idea of “marketing oneself.” The panelists advised that one’s online presence is a form of marketing. Therefore, current LinkedIn profiles and participation in networking groups and alumni organizations, etc., are essential to promoting oneself. The panelists suggested forming and establishing good recruiting relationships by joining LinkedIn groups (e.g., PharmaThursdays) and interacting with recruiters so that appropriate opportunities would be presented. Finally, the panelists suggested that since women are less likely to promote themselves and find it hard to ask for new opportunities, women need to find several mentors to help them navigate the workforce. In sum, the panelists agreed that women need to take the initiative to manage their own careers and think of themselves as their “own CEOs.”

SEE PHOTOS ON NEXT PAGE



President-Elect, Alice Marcy,
opening the program



Vice President, Becky Klein,
introducing the panelists



Linda Resnick (left) and Colleen Hamilton



Annette Baron

Photos by Sherri Meyer