

Getting noticed is half the battle

The hiring game starts early. Well before a faculty position even opens, department members and administrators tend to observe the available pool of candidates and shortlist the ones they consider most promising. Savvy candidates work this preselection process to their advantage. Some ways of doing this are obvious: Be an excellent scholar. Publish well. Work hard. Communicate with the public and your peers. But a well-planned, long-range effort to ensure your visibility among those who have hiring responsibilities can be the deciding factor.

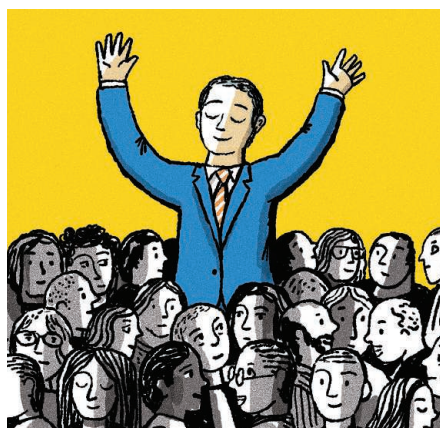
Here's how it worked for me. I arrived at the University of Toronto in 1982 as a postdoctoral diploma candidate in clinical biochemistry. Coming from a rather poor country—Greece—was a disadvantage, so I did all I could to adapt to the new environment, fill in my knowledge gaps, and make a good impression with hard work and dedication. When I finished the diploma training in 1984, the chair of the department showed interest in finding a job for me. But I had to go back to Greece first to complete my medical degree. I finished it in 1986.

When I returned to Toronto, I was hired as the director of research and development at a small biotechnology company spun off from the university; I also had an adjunct position in clinical biochemistry at the University of Toronto. I had no special training or experience in business management, but I found myself directing eight Ph.D. scientists, working together to develop a commercial product.

Working at a company was not my first choice, but I gave it everything I had, and the work I did there laid a cornerstone for my future success. I learned to appreciate the difficulties associated with developing and commercializing a system, which we succeeded in doing toward the end of my time there. I learned how to manage people and how to keep them focused on a single task. I met with potential customers and investors and learned how to negotiate and promote products and ideas.

The job was good and challenging, but it was not what I was aiming for in the long term. Meanwhile, a new chair had taken over in the department, and I set out to persuade him to hire me as an academic clinician-scientist.

I worked 16 to 17 hours a day, not just to make progress on the technology but also to publish our results in high-impact journals. How did I manage it? My wife—also



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a Ph.D. scientist—worked far less than I did; she took on the bulk of the domestic responsibilities. Our children spent many Saturdays and some Sundays playing in the company lobby. We made lunch in the break room microwave.

My colleagues and I managed to publish numerous papers, and I was invited repeatedly to present at national and international conferences. I was able to demonstrate, in the department's annual report, scientific productivity comparable in quantity and quality to the full-time academics in the department. I made sure these activities were noticed.

I made myself visible by participating in every research seminar—not easy, considering the hour-long drive and how busy I was at the company. Each time I entered the lecture room, I made a point of passing in front of the department chair before sitting down. At the end of every seminar, I made sure to ask a carefully crafted question or two.

After 18 months of this, the chair paid me an unexpected visit at the company and invited me to become his deputy in the department and at the teaching hospital. Ten years later, I succeeded him.

Our daughter, by the way, is now a Ph.D. scientist working as a clinical chemist, and our son is in training to become an M.D.-Ph.D. neuropathologist. My wife is a senior scientist at a major teaching hospital.

Making sure you are noticed can give you the edge you need over your silent competition. ■

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