

What to do when you don't to pursue a career in academia

Let's face it- we enter graduate school with hopes of potentially having a lab one day. Even though the path is assuredly long and arduous, we dream of the day we'll get our own lab to finally go down the list of a long list of experiments we've collected over the course of graduate school and one (if not more) postdoctoral appointments. But it is no secret that funding for basic biomedical research is dwindling; so how feasible is it really to acquire a lab, and more importantly, get sustained funding? Here are a few tips if you are at some point in the graduate or postdoctoral career, and are wondering how you can use your graduate experience to build a career outside traditional academia. The good news is that as graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, we have more experience than we give ourselves credit for. The task is to find a way to leverage the experience and get to a position that makes you valued and satisfied.

1. Find you are passionate about – Maybe grant-writing makes you want to hide in a corner and cry, but you get really excited about coming up with more effective ways of conducting experiments and running a lab. Maybe you like communicating your science to a non-scientific audience. Or, maybe you're a visual thinker and like coming up with graphical representations for scientific phenomenon. Whatever it is, there is probably something about the scientific process that makes you excited.

2. Find ways to get experience – Undoubtedly, you are busy with experiments to do and papers to write. However, dedicate some time to get experience in a field outside of traditional science. Keep your eyes open for internships and volunteering opportunities, and use your time so that you take care of your lab responsibilities, but are also building your CV.

3. Be open to options – Attend seminars, lectures and meetings even if they are not exactly related to your interests. You never know when the next opportunity will come your way!

4. Explore online opportunities – Are there certifications or courses you could take online to advance your interests? Perhaps you have always been interested in program management, but don't know what exactly it entails. Try and find online courses that could potentially help you.

5. Learn how to network – This means not only in-person networking, but online networking as well. Learn how to use LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook to your advantage.