

PLENARY TALKS Q&A

OCTOBER 3, 2021

Q. Very interesting talk, Dr. Ruben. Can you tell us about some skills from scientific comedy that could be transferable into mainstream science? (Asked by Jay Gandhi)

A. Directly engage with whatever part of what you're writing about is the most complicated/uncomfortable. In comedy, you have to be 100% in control of what you're saying or writing. It's the same with science. If you're writing about something you don't fully understand, stop, and go understand it before you keep writing. Also, keep everything as short as possible. Eliminate extra words.

Q. Great examples, Adam! How about an article on "When your supervisor seeks a recommendation letter from you"? - As most of the times being a STEM professionals our lives revolve around getting a good reco from our bosses at several career points and we are always skeptical about it whether we will get a nice one from your supervisors. (Asked by Avijit Banik)

A. That's a good idea! I'll add it to my list, thanks!

Q. Very interesting talk Adam! I am an astrophysics PhD and I am interested to enter in the field of science communication. Can you give us an idea about how to get started to enter the field?(Asked by Moupiya)

A. Find low-stakes and no-stakes ways to begin. Look for smaller but still respectable publications (newspapers, blogs, university publications), come up with an idea for an article, and pitch it to them. If you're interested in live science communication, find places where you can give talks--there are (or were, pre-pandemic) science cafes like Nerd Night, Thirst, and Profs & Pints, where you can give a presentation about your research at a bar while the audience drinks. Hopefully those will come back--they were interesting and fun.

Q. Dr. Ruben, how does writing a science communication article differ from that of a scientific publication? (Asked by Mitradip Das)

A. It's annoying, but scientific journal articles leave almost no room for creativity. They're dry and factual, and their goal is to deliver data, not to entertain. Good writing skills are important for writing these, but not quite in the same way.

Q. A friend of mine got passed up on a job opportunity (in UK) recently. He strongly believes it was connected to his side hustle as a youtube/twitch streamer. He hadn't told them about it but because he had his channel associated with his personal email for receiving subscriptions/donations, they were able to figure out He had an online presence and even asked him about how serious he was about his streaming during the interview. He has since stopped streaming and now has managed to secure a position elsewhere (a pity since his channel was at that stage where it was taking off too) Have you heard about any similar cases? (Asked by Sanu Shameer)

A. Very interesting. I had a similar experience. My PI in grad school, when he found out about my extracurricular activities, called me into the office and told me I was an embarrassment to the department. I learned that day that I needed to hide my comedy etc. from him. That sounds cowardly and deceptive, but really, what I do outside the lab on my own time is my own business, as long as it doesn't affect my lab work. So, I kept doing what I was doing,

but I stopped talking about it. That's too bad about your friend; it sounds like the same thing happened to him.

Q. Does building a network involve making personal connections/friendships through regular interaction or only professional connections through linkedin etc. are good enough?

A. Not all in your network can be your friends nor that is required. Professional relationship is good. However, many a times, sometime do get converted into friendships as well.

Q. How many years would you say is ideal in switching careers and not look we are not reliable?

A. Nothing set in stone but it is best to spend atleast a couple of years to gain the experience and learn before deciding to move on.

Q. Amazing talk! Career and leadership coaching is one of the alternate careers in the west. Would something like this be useful in India especially for women (to become a coach and be coached). Thank you! (Asked by Madhu Sevanna)

A. One needs to explore but I can say that it is really required. Becoming a coach at a later point in life is one of my ambitions! :)

Q. Hello Dr. Jain, I am currently a graduate student in the last year of my PhD and am inclined to pursue a non-academic career option. I was wondering how difficult it was for you to switch from a research environment to a management role. Do organizations judge you based on volunteer activities that you have done or are specific courses/ internships advisable to make this switch?? (Asked by Aswathy Chandran)

A. It is not difficult if you are clear of your decision. For me, it was a bit of a challenge but the understanding that each career path is different and having the right mentors helped me navigate reasonably well. There are no specific courses available for non-academic career paths however if you are clear about the path, you can acquire some required technical skills as you are still in your formative years. Internships are always great and adds to your experience.

Q. Thank you so much for sharing your journey. I have a question about how to navigate a career break. (Asked by Sonali Saha)

A. <https://scisoup.org/columns/2020/career-breaks-and-women-in-science-in-India-06092020-I.html> Hope this will be useful.