

## **Staying on Track – April 11, 2019 Supervisor Series**

### **Highlights of what I have learned about postdocs**

- 22% Canadian, about 20% PR – so really 78% are culturally international
- The average postdoc is just over a year
- Many postdocs are confused about their actual roles and responsibilities
- Many postdocs have no idea how to make the most of their fellowships
- From the exit survey, 16% of respondents have no papers written and 24% who did not attend any conferences
- Only 12% have had written feedback on performance, and 28% received no feedback
- Comments about feeling isolated came from both large and small research groups (21% of postdocs are in research groups of more than 15 people and 3% are in groups of just themselves and the PI).

### **Highlights of what I learned about supervisors**

- Faculty are working very hard and have little time (they need help). Lots of paper work outside of manuscript preparation.
- 383 faculty since 2000 have had postdocs (David Wishart has had 53)
- I have never found a session on campus that focuses on supervision and PDFs in the past 20 years on campus.
- 78% faculty surveyed have career conversations or introduce their PDFs to stakeholders (they may wait for the PDF to initiate the conversation), yet few postdocs feel they are having these conversations/introductions.

### **Practices to keep a healthy, productive relationship.**

- Make sure postdoc is capable of completing the project – what is their experience, do they have the resources, what will they need to complete the project.
- Connecting with postdocs depends on the person and project. Could be daily, depending on where the PDF is in the project.
- Post project plan/contract on the office wall so when we meet, we check progress and adapt as needed
- Have PDF organize some team project – could be a reading group, conference, something connected to publication – so that PDF is connected to the group. If high stakes with fixed data, will motivate PDF and helps stage PDF progress. They need a lead role.
- Provide mentoring role for PDF.
- Postdocs are more expensive than PhD students, so why are you bringing them in? PDFs need to produce more and if they aren't training your PhD students, you need to take on that role.
- We are mentors, not supervisors. We learn from each other. Stay nimble to what the needs are of the PDF.
- PDFs need to understand what part of your research project is theirs to take when they leave. Keep conversations open.
- Deal with issues early, don't let them get out of hand, be inclusive in the lab.
- Funding dictates the amount of freedom. I want to engage postdocs in a variety of activities.
- Explain the value of why you ask them to do what you do.
- If your group overlaps, that helps with project management. Many PDFs take on another grad student/person to help them.

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### **Job Fact Sheet/Roles**

- We don't want a job fact sheet to define the roles of the PDFs, they are academics. Roles need to be presented more broadly.
- Keep job description vague. You don't always get what you expect.

### **Industry Partnerships**

- I am very selective with industry partners so that there are no surprises with employment issues. Tricouncil spells out more of the HR issues.
- I do not fund postdocs or students from industry/donations as too unpredictable.

### **Teaching**

- As long as project is moving along, no issue for me.
- Depends on the goal of the postdoc. If they want academic careers, I create some opportunities, such as a guest lecture which is a bit shielded. I build it into my teaching and give them a critique on their teaching.
- Salary cannot be deducted from their pay (Policy)

### **PDF Coordinator (Like Grad Chair/Grad Coordinator)**

- There would be value for departments/faculties to have this position. What would the cost be? Can it be absorbed into existing position?
- Would be good to have a PDFA faculty rep as well. We need to create more social opportunities for PDFs within our units.

### **Mentoring**

- PDFs miss big picture, long term focus gets lost when they and I have several students to mentor.
- High upfront then back off as pdf gets settled in their project. So may meet a lot initially but infrequently later on.
- I pair up PDF with Grad and Grad with Undergrad for mentoring within my group.
- I get input on their goals so have an idea of what opportunities they could benefit from.

### **Authorship**

- Authorship needs to be upfront.
- Shared first authorship becoming more common
- Field dependent and need to be aware of impact on PDF career.
- As the supervisor, you need to make the call on contributions when they are close.