

Getting Your Foot in the Door

Editorial

Below, two young colleagues share their experiences as mentees and the benefits they gained from such programmes. First, Geneviève Laumen tells it from the perspective of being part of an organised, structured mentorship. Next, Ivana Turek

shares her experiences from a combination of internship and self-organised mentorship. Despite the different paths they travelled, it is heart-warming to read about their journey of transitioning from academia to industry.

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A Tale of Two Mentees

How mentoring got me where I am today

When Raquel Billiones asked me if I would like to contribute to this section, my first thought was: “Yes, of course what a great opportunity for me.” My second thought was: “Oh my gosh. What can I say? I am just a fledgling and completely new to the field of medical writing.” I hope that sharing my experience will be an incentive for others to break from the classical academic route and be open to the versatile options out there.

Classical academic career

I was always intrigued by the processes of life and nature around me, therefore I decided to study biology. After a few years I ended up sitting dispirited in a lab, asking myself how I should proceed. Reaching the end of my PhD, I was sure that I did not want to stay in academia. However, I was unsure what else was out there. I was surrounded by researchers with a straight academic path, and I pondered what else could I do with my knowledge and skills.

New inputs

It was by coincidence that my doctoral programme offered mentorships for PhD students and postdocs. It was a one-year programme with regular mentor-mentee meetings and accompanying workshops on topics such as career planning or conflict management. During the regular monthly meetings with my mentor, we discussed not only typically PhD-related topics, like time management and coping with failure, but also career planning. I remember looking at different job advertisements during one of our meetings. For me, it was reassuring how many opportunities are out there where I could use my skills and knowledge.

However, I was not aware of medical writing until I attended the career day in neuroscience at my university. One of the presenters was a science journalist who gave an enthusiastic talk about medical writing. During my studies, I practised classical scientific writing by drafting my thesis and manuscripts for publication. I enjoyed analysing, summarising, and presenting data. In the laboratory, one sometimes loses the bigger picture of one's research while working on tiny bits and pieces. Therefore, writing a paper or giving a talk to put data in context brought me joy.

I needed a break

Shortly after the mentoring programme, I finished my PhD and decided to take a year off to take a deep breath. So I travelled, together with my fiancée, around the world. We had a wonderful year with unforgettable memories, like watching the lights in the trees in Singapore's Gardens by the Bay, snorkelling with turtles in Australia's Ningaloo Reef on Christmas Day, observing stunning waterfalls in New Zealand's Milford Sounds, enjoying a relaxing Thai massage on Koh Phangan, or driving with our old VW T3 van across Europe.

Unexpected turn

An unexpected disruption of our trip due to a broken oil pipe in our van forced us to stay at home for two weeks waiting for a spare part. Since I knew that our travel would not continue forever, I used our break to take a quick look at open positions that would fit my skills and interests. To narrow down my search, I looked for positions where I could use my scientific knowledge in auditory research. I checked the

websites of manufacturers for implantable hearing solutions since some former colleagues found positions in this medical device area. Two manufacturers had vacancies for a medical writing position in scientific publishing. This directly caught my attention since the job description dovetails with all I love about science. I applied for both positions as we continued our travel.

Failure and success

After a few days, I got a rejection from one manufacturer, which was disappointing, but I was



invited for a job interview by the other manufacturer. This happened while travelling, so there I was, sitting in a hotel room in Southern France, having a job interview and taking a writing test. In the end I didn't get the job; however, they offered me another position as a clinical evaluation manager that fits my background better.

Meanwhile back in Germany (after escaping heavy snow in Spain), I had a second phone interview and was invited to Innsbruck, Austria. At first, I felt a bit overwhelmed by so many new faces. However, the atmosphere in the office was very welcoming and all the interviews went well. The next day, I got a call offering me the job. I was unbelievably happy although this meant a huge change for me. After a few weeks in Germany, we packed up our things to move from one of the flattest parts of Germany (Oldenburger Land) to the Alps. It was a big step for us, but it was worth it. I am fortunate to work with such a professional team and colleagues that helped me to settle in quickly. My main responsibility is to conduct systematic literature searches, appraisal and summaries of literature, and the writing of clinical evaluation reports for medical devices. My background in hearing research definitely helps me with these tasks.

Mentoring: A two-way street

The first two years have been an exciting journey with a steep learning curve. Last year the head of my department asked me if I wanted to take part in Elemed's mentorship programme. Since I had such good memories and benefits from the previous programme, I immediately accepted it and did not regret it. My mentor is such an inspiring person and gives me so much insight into the field of medical writing. I can definitely recommend mentorship to everyone. A mentor can give you career advice, emotional support, or help you learn specific skills. It feels like a safe space where you can ask all your questions and talk about your concerns, fears, and hopes. You will learn from the experience of your mentor, while they get new insights from your perspective. It is a bilateral engagement with a long-lasting relationship as the best outcome.

It is advantageous to structure your mentorship time. Documents like session logs and development plans give you a structure and ensure that you keep your goals in mind. Therefore, it helps to define what you expect from your mentorship, discuss how you can achieve your goals with your mentor, and check your progress regularly.

One of the benefits of a professionally organised mentorship programme is the regular exchange with other mentees and the accom-

panying webinars about diverse topics. However, an informal and self-organised mentorship is also fruitful.

Summary

Mentorship definitely helped me progress in my career and pursue my passion. I can recommend it to everyone. Regardless if it is a structured programmed or self-organised, you will benefit from it in many ways.



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The path of professional self-fulfilment

A few facts to start

After cosily floating around in warm darkness for approximately nine months, a sudden flash of light hits the baby's eyes and pulls it into a new, noisy world.

This world brimming with novelty is quite different from the mother's womb and demands various changes. As time passes, children familiarise themselves with the environment, growing into it, and suddenly, a few years have gone by and everybody is keen to know and understand who we want to become.

When children are asked about their plans for the future, most of them say they want to be a superhero, a veterinarian or a pilot, or that they just don't know yet. An answer which relates to working on one's personal improvement is not valid in adults' eyes and children are expected to express their career goals with certainty even if they are far too young to do so.¹

Eventually, every person will choose a professional path to follow, and after finishing compulsory education, he or she will decide to either pursue higher education or find a job. According to Rose and Ortiz-Ostina,² North America has the highest percentage of students enrolling in college education at approximately 84%; followed by Europe and Central Asia at 62%, and 43% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even though at a first glance, a higher education may seem the doorway to the promised land for any job seeker, the actual statistics are in stark contrast to this belief.

In the US, 41% of recent graduates are employed in roles that don't require a degree, according to data published by the Federal Reserve Bank in New York in 2020.³ This is especially the case for this current year, 2021, as with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the number of entry level jobs for graduates has fallen by 45%.⁴ The situation on the European market isn't much better; the unemployment rate rose by 3 percentage points within just a few months at the beginning of the pandemic.⁵ Nevertheless, this data shouldn't discourage us, it is just a reference point for gaining a better understanding of the market and it serves as proof that having a degree isn't a guarantee for landing a job. Regardless of the latter, higher education should be made available to anyone who is hungry for more knowledge and wants to specialise in a specific field.



From a passionate learner to a higher calling

If there is no instant solution for landing a dream job, then why even study? How should one go about pursuing their goals?

I was raised to adhere to the motto *Scientia potentia est* (Latin for *knowledge is power*), and was taught that, by applying these words to your daily life, success is just a step away. However, in my experience, besides knowledge, there are many factors that can help bring you forward. Speaking broadly, when pursuing a goal or a dream job, some of the following ideas may help: find a mentor, get the necessary experience, network, and be persistent.

My experience

In the last year of my PhD programme, I did my internship at a company, in a role that involved having direct contact with customers, but was

still laboratory-based. For the first time, my performance with respect to the outcome of the assigned project also impacted sales. Even though this was only a three-month internship, this experience was instrumental for me in landing a job in the marketing department of a pharmaceutical company. Knowing that this role was not my dream goal, I found myself a mentor who gave me well thought-out insights on how to pursue my real professional goal. In my case, I was advised to network and to pursue an additional training certificate in my desired field. I learned that every person you meet or any experience you get along the way is a step closer to the intended goal. I ended up getting a training certificate in clinical research and showed great interest in regulatory affairs within my company. I was interested in understanding the key skills required for that position, and I worked on improving them. After a few months



of intense job hunting, I got a job in regulatory affairs.

Realisation

If you want to achieve a specific goal, whether in your career or in personal development, you probably already have a vision of it. Three main attributes can help you achieve your goal, such as action, determination, and networking.

To have a vision and to work on a specific goal is essential. This has been known to mankind for the last 2,700 years – as the Bible says: “*Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26 NKJV). Believing is just a part of it, the action is, however, the driving force that will bring you towards your goal.

The second ingredient of the recipe for success is determination: “*Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will*

take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever” (Lance Armstrong).

When you are getting one step closer toward your goal, don’t forget about people. Networking, as a third component, can help you share your ideas and experience, and deliver you important information for your goal.

If we compare our abilities and achievements to those of others, there will always be those who are inferior or superior to us. There are personalities, abilities, and achievements of all colours of the rainbow, and we shouldn’t be afraid to learn from them. You can save yourself a lot of time and resources if you let somebody share reliable experience or advice with you. So, by understanding the journey

of other successful people, finding a mentor, and staying on track, you are sure to make it to the top; just don’t get discouraged by diverse challenges on your path to achievement. The obstacles are here to make you a better version of yourself.

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