

Guideline Nine | Build a community

9. Build and nurture a community of researchers involving all your team in a way that encourages collaboration rather than competition.

"Eli manages to create a nurturing yet scientifically intense lab atmosphere that promotes the production of high-quality science without the element of interpersonal competition that is unfortunately so evident in many laboratories, particularly here in the United States"

One of the major lessons learnt as Head of a School of Microbiology and Immunology or PVC (Education) was the importance of building communities. Thus it was not surprising when building the research team as a scientific and social community was another attribute of great mentors put forward for the Nature awards. This does not just happen, special strategies need to be devised to deliberately build the communities and to nurture them. The demise of communal lunches or coffee breaks in many Schools is a great shame and potentially leads to isolation of groups and individuals just at a time when we are being encouraged to be interdisciplinary.

Weekly group meetings, seminar series, journal clubs etc are all well tested vehicles for building a community of scientists. However, the leader needs to put much thought into the processes used, to ensure that all feel valued and heard and they are not just a platform for the usual suspects to expound their views. Examples described included going round the group in a Journal club with each participant speaking for three minutes. This allowed all who may have been too shy to talk to contribute and restrained the talkative. Some hold all-day meetings each six months where everyone, including the supervisor, prepared a single page listing things they are planning to achieve or complete over the next six months. They also write brief comments on achievement against the targets they set at the previous meeting. In another group, all new honours students were assigned to a PhD student who acted as a lab mentor. This contributed to the collegial environment of the lab and was a great practical experience in mentoring for the graduate students. Others put teams together to write drafts of papers or a review

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