

ASA Early Career Researcher Mentoring Workshop – Session summary

Session Topic: Leadership
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If you only remember three things from this talk, remember these...

1. Everyone needs to be a leader in some fashion.
2. There are multiple ways and different types of leadership.
3. Leadership is a skill you can learn and get better at. Practice it!

Session summary/notes

(from MC) Every researcher is in a position of leadership of some sort. From typical situations, such as coordinating the writing of a multiple-author paper, or managing a multi-national facility, to less obvious ones, such as being a postdoc talking to graduate students in a social event, there are opportunities to learn and craft our leadership styles and attributes.

There are many attributes of being a leader. Some that resonate and are relevant for us are honesty, authenticity, caring, strength of character, team building, vision and legacy, prompt to action and achievement. Very important! Leaders help create new leaders.

Ask yourself:

- What do you look in a leader?
- Think of different leaders you meet, what sorts of leaders were they? (visionary, able to inspire, having integrity, being passionate ...)
- Which of these properties do you have? Which ones you should learn and practice?

For ECRs, the best way to learn how to be a good leader is leading:

- try to be a leader in some sort (e.g.: committee, student supervision, big research project). Know your weaknesses and play to your strengths, and it's good to start big!
- Use your strengths and identify the type(s) of leadership that use them.
- Be sure to practice and use different approaches, as no one single style of leadership will work in all instances and with all people.
- don't be afraid to fail – (you will fail, and many of your decisions will be wrong). Plan into the future and be prepared that some things may not turn out as you expected.

(from PQ) Good leaders:

1. Have a goal or a big picture and try to inspire those around them in order to reach the goal (vision).
2. Are not afraid of making decisions, delegate tasks, and prepare for less than ideal outcomes (make plans and contingencies).
3. Clearly outline what they expect of others (communication).

(from RW) Effective leaders are agents of change and achievement, build communities, and know how to assign roles that can complete tasks effectively. But more importantly, they don't make themselves the focus!

In terms of gender and leadership:

- Still a long way to go: many causes, among them: available pool, life choices, biases such as the 'prove it again', 'men are geniuses, women are hard workers', locker room mentality, less opportunities for networking. This makes growth of percentage of female leaders very slow
- Community needs to provide opportunities to women, and realize that the more 'masculine' (or agentic) style of leadership is not always the most effective one: qualities associated with female leaders, a more 'communal' or transformational style, based on innovation, trust and empowering are very effective in modern organizations
- To nurture current female leaders and developing new ones, to reach a critical mass, emphasis should be given to networking opportunities, leadership opportunities, family friendly workplaces and transparency in decision making.

Interesting quotes from the discussion

Historically astronomical research was done by individuals or in small groups. However, the scientific world is moving towards large collaborations: being able to lead small subgroups, or organise large collaborations will be much sought after.

Transformational leadership, where one helps those "below" them improve and develop, is often the most appropriate form of leadership in science rather than transactional or laissez-faire leadership styles. Science works best when the next generation are passionate, well trained and have are able to take on leadership roles.

As a leader it is important to recognize that while most people will not shirk at their duties, make poor decisions or commit wrongs, most will also do not speak out about others that do. You need to speak out when you see a wrongdoing.

Integrity is very important property of a good leader.

Be coherent and clear about what you say and do what you say. Be prepared to let go of tasks and delegate.

