

Over the Academic Hurdle: Power of Networking

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One of the most difficult decisions for any student in a graduate school is figuring out what to do when it's all over. (It will end, someday, I promise). My graduate school experience was similar to so many others and had trained me for little else beyond an academic career. As I wrote my thesis and prepared to move on with my life, I began to panic. I scoured job sites frantically, hourly, looking for post-doctoral fellowships or any other position that would hire an "inexperienced" Ph.D. I had no idea where my feet would land, but with a mortgage and lofty personal goals, they had to land somewhere. Fortunately, I realized I did not have to brave this journey alone or unsupported.

I had been a member of the Association for Women In Science (AWIS) NJ since 2007, casually attending a couple of events with minimal involvement and with only my own interests in mind. But I knew the time had come to open up socially and begin working harder to network and support other women in a dismal unemployment climate. I was elected as chapter Secretary for 2013 and invited to write and edit for the AWIS NJ online newsletter. I began attending every event hosted by AWIS NJ, interacting with fantastic women across all professions. AWIS NJ helped to enrich that narrow interface between the personal and professional, an area that I had shamefully neglected for too many years. Ultimately, networking and professional development are essential to helping anyone (including women) navigate their way through the employment jungle to find the career they crave in this millennium. And something very critical that I learned immediately was that women especially want to help other women; only we truly understand the complexity of our practical struggles in career advancement.

In October of 2013, AWIS hosted an event with the [Science Master's Program at Rutgers](#) where professionals from companies like [Jeiven Pharmaceuticals](#), [Shionogi Inc.](#), and [Integrium](#) were invited to share their stories of career success. Here, I was introduced to one of the young speakers with a brief mention of my career aspirations in medical writing. Serendipitously, her company was actively seeking a medical writer. My expectations were low and the location seemed impossible for me, but I promised myself I would never turn down the opportunity for interview experience. In fact, I had begun treating interviews more like networking opportunities themselves, chances to meet new faces and make a lasting impression. After emailing my CV, I received a phone call from the CEO's administrator and had a phone interview within 2 weeks. It was satisfying and fulfilling just to know that I had not been buried in a stack of resumes and that someone on their end, who I had met only once, was standing behind me!

I started work on December 16th, on my own terms, in a job I really, *really* wanted. Many valuable lessons brought me to this point in my career, including the importance of **patience** and maintaining a **positive attitude**. But most important of all, you must get out from behind the computer screen and the electronic application process. It can obviously lead to success but cannot absorb 100% of your efforts, because standing out in a stack of applications is very difficult regardless of how excellent your credentials may be. Become involved, support local organizations like AWIS, and you will get back what you have put in!

Although I live far from the AWIS NJ epicenter and am expecting my first baby, I continue to contribute to AWIS NJ anyway that I can. I understand that the relationships I have built must be nurtured and maintained- the process is ongoing. Ultimately, I hope for the perfect opportunity to help someone else catch the same break. With every email from LinkedIn, Monster, HERC, *etc.* I consider all of the great people I know and interact with regularly and whether they might be interested in a particular opportunity. So then the important question to ask yourself now is: ***does AWIS know you?***