

Practice Makes Perfect?

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Given the choice of presenting a poster or a talk at a conference, most people would choose presenting a poster. On the surface, this seems to be the easier choice as glossophobia runs rampant in our society. I think presenting a poster is easier than discussing and arguing data in front of keen and sometimes hostile peers. Why, then, did I choose to present my graduate data in the form of a talk at several APS conferences instead of choosing the easier path? I felt that practicing speaking in public was more important than my comfort level and would give me the confidence I would need in future job-related proposals and conferences.

It has been almost six years since I presented my graduate findings in front of a scientific audience. My first time presenting was at the APS North Central Division meeting in Ames, IA. There are only two things I distinctly remember from that experience: I thought that I was over dressed in my suit, and I think I said “um” a few more times than I wanted. Yes, I vaguely remember being nervous and trembling a little before the talk and after, but the experience as a whole was not memorable. Nothing “bad” happened. No one crucified me. I don’t even remember anyone asking a question. However, I had a different experience at the APS meeting in Portland.

My situation going into Portland was different than it was at the North Central Division meeting. I was in the middle of my master’s degree when I first presented. However, when I presented my research in Portland, I already had a job lined up and my master’s degree was on the way. I remember being nervous and going over my presentation again and again. In fact, the day before my presentation, I found an error in my PowerPoint. I fixed the error and thought I had saved the document. The day of the presentation, I loaded the PowerPoint onto the computer. Butterflies filled my stomach as the time to present loomed near. I feared that the audience would suggest I had not completed the research or the science was not sound.

My nervousness only intensified as I stood up to start my talk. With a shaky voice, I began to present my research. As I was presenting, I noticed that one of my slides referenced the wrong paper. (This was the

error I thought I had fixed and saved.) I failed to mention this to the crowd. Afterward, the author I referenced came up to me and introduced himself. He wanted to correct my erroneous reference. He joked at the error and I blushed at my mistake. I feared making a mistake and I had, but being confronted by a known professor on that mistake was not as scary as I originally had imagined. That’s usually how it goes—your imagined situation is worse than the situation at hand.

I still get butterflies while presenting in front of people. Presenting at the APS conference did not cure the nervousness I get while presenting my work, but it did give

me more confidence. There are a plethora of reasons why presenting a talk at the APS conference may be a better choice than a poster. With a talk, people get to hear your research the way you want to tell it, see how you do under pressure, ask questions, and make comments or suggestions. You also don’t have to wait by your poster for people to eventually come by, for a few minutes at most, to read and ask you questions before moving onto another display.

Finally, some advice for those who will present: be sure you practice out loud, go over your PowerPoint again and again, and should you find a mistake while presenting, own up. ■

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Build Better Relationships—Leverage Conflict as Opportunity



Science is a social occupation. Leaders at all levels need to build positive relationships and manage conflict in productive ways. The inability to do this can stall or derail a career. Unfortunately, these self-management and interpersonal skills do not come naturally to all people and are often overlooked in academic coursework. To complicate the situation, we live in a world of differences.

Have you ever met a person that you liked almost immediately? Or someone you didn’t? Have you worked for a boss whose priorities and style drove you crazy? Did you take the “perfect” job only to find that the team’s approach to the work was so different from your own that you went home every night exhausted? If any of these sound familiar, we hope you will join us for the 2014 APS Leadership Institute on August 9 in Minneapolis.

This preconference session is designed around two half-day topics. The morning will focus on effective workplace behaviors and building professional relationships, while the afternoon will build on the morning session and focus on developing skills to positively resolve conflict in the workplace. Participants will have the chance to explore these topics with colleagues in a relaxed environment and will leave the conference with new skills and practical strategies.

The session will be facilitated by **Sherry Harsch-Porter**, president of The Porter Bay Group, Inc., a leadership development consulting firm founded in 2000. Harsch-Porter teaches at Washington University in St. Louis, is a contributing author to the landmark coaching reference book *The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Coaching: From Theory to Practice*, and is author of *Education as Possibility: Coaching for Persistence*.

Learn more about these topics by reading a short white paper (www.apsnet.org/members/apsleadership/documents/softersideofscience2014.pdf). Or, make sure to register for the workshop. The \$95 cost for the workshop is substantially supported by APS Council as a priority for leadership development within APS. Added to the APS support, attendee fees help cover your individual work style assessment, workshop materials, coffee breaks, and lunch. Space is limited to 50 participants, so make sure to register today! ■