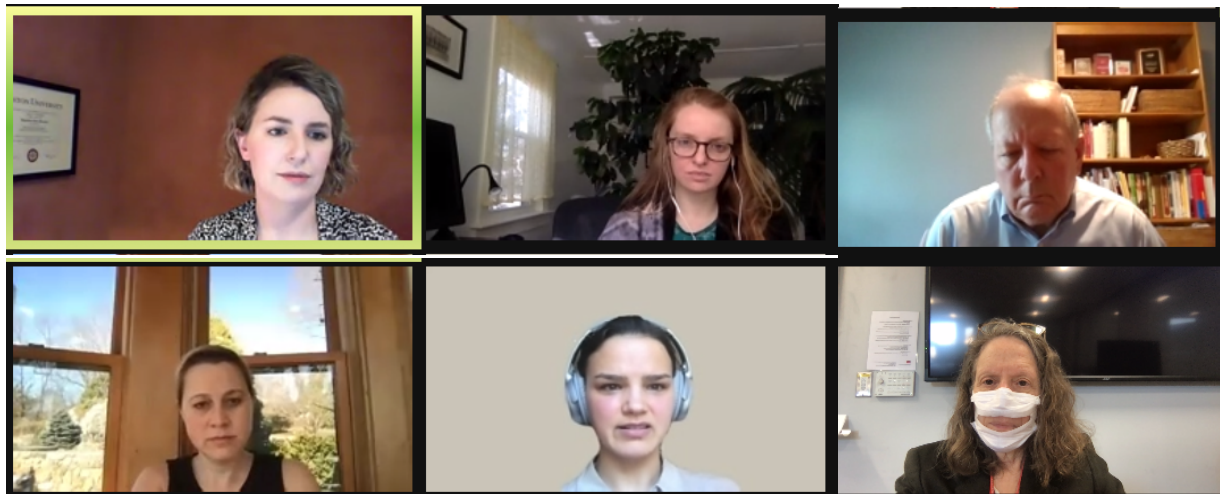


Panel discussion: Careers in industry March 3, 2021

Summary by Todd Dowrey and Kara Farquharson



Panelists

Top; pictured left to right

Dr. Jacqueline (Bouchard) Loud; AbbVie Senior Scientist II, Immunology Pharmacology; Culture Ambassador

Dr. Lisa Rice; Scientist, Moderna

Dr. Robert Buehler; Consultant

Bottom; pictured left to right

Dr. Erika Ebbel Angle; CEO, Ixcela, Inc.; Founder & Executive Director, Science from Scientists

Dr. Rebecca Kusko; Chief Strategy Officer, Immuneering Corp.

Dr. Barbara Schreiber; BUSM Associate Professor of Biochemistry (Moderator)

Introductions

The panelists began the event by giving introductions about who they are and how their education and career paths led them to the positions they hold today. A common theme was that these individuals remained open to new opportunities regardless of what their “5-year plan” was at the time. This often led to new perspectives and breaking with the common notions about what certain career paths entail.

What are your plans to move into the next stage of your career?

Dr. Rice began answering this question by discussing how young scientists should try to gain exposure to as many facets as possible in the companies in which they’re working. This will yield a more holistic perspective about how industry science operates. She also mentioned that she enjoys wearing many hats in a position and this allows her to learn about many areas of industry science, even if some areas are not what she plans to do long term.

Dr. Angle described that in an entrepreneurship role, as someone who started her own company, she has mostly been her own boss, which presents its own challenges in conducting science in industry. She has had to be accountable for her own learning and stay active and open to gaining knowledge about all areas of operating a company. This includes not only the science conducted at a company, but the finance, fundraising, manufacturing and other important arms of a successful company.

Dr. Loud described the rewarding aspects of managing teams of scientists and the soft skills necessary to do so. She talked about how new positions are often created for people to match their skill sets and career goals, so people should always advocate for their own career interests when in the job market.

What are the skills (hard or soft) that are important to master in order to succeed in your career path?

Dr. Kusko is involved in recruiting for her company and she provided some insights into what makes applicants more appealing. She made the point that hard skills should be stated clearly and early on in an applicant's CV or resume as these will be a critical aspect of the job application review. Also, soft skills that are commonly found on applicants' materials should be reinforced by describing positions and experiences that helped develop those skills. She spotlighted the importance of building a network in graduate school as it will open opportunities in the future.

In the job search, Dr. Rice implored the audience to know what they are looking for when applying for jobs in science. She emphasized that one should spend the time researching a company's size, culture, and what the average workday might look like. Applicants are not only being interviewed by the company, but they should be interviewing the company to see if it is the right fit.

Dr. Angle and Buehler collectively talked about how soft skills are often not included in normal curriculum and young scientists only really develop these skills when performing the roles that require them. Applicants should be honest about the experiences they've had and as many young scientists will enter industry without many of these so-called soft skills, they should be open to learning them on the job.

If you had to do it over again, is there anything you would do differently?

Dr. Loud and Dr. Rice love their jobs and would not change anything. Dr. Loud explained that when she first was applying to jobs, she was naïve and applied to jobs outside her field without the necessary hard skills. She emphasized that these skills are important in finding a career so she advised that during graduate school, be sure that those skills are being built. The best way to ensure the correct hard skill set is to talk to those currently in industry i.e. networking is important.

Dr. Buehler agreed that he wouldn't change his career path while emphasizing that those starting their careers may have an idea of a specific career direction and that could change.

Dr. Angle highlighted that she does not always enjoy her job, but she wouldn't change anything about her career. She once again pushed the audience to keep learning and researching.

Dr. Kusko loves her career but stressed to the audience to keep time management and mental health a priority in their training and career.

How do you manage your work-life balance?

Dr. Kusko made a point of utilizing a 'Marie Kondo' approach to work. She ensures that time is being spent well and trims what is not productive. Her other advice was to make time where you are 'busy' with yourself.

Dr. Buehler agreed with effective time management, and implored others to get off the virtual screen and interact with others one on one whenever possible. There is so much to learn!

Dr. Rice and Dr. Loud talked about turning off notifications and respecting others' times. Also, they recommended prioritizing the most important things first and doing side projects later. This follows the 80/20 rule where 80% of the work can be done in 20% of the time. They emphasized the importance of having support systems outside of the lab as well.

Dr. Angle admitted that she does not follow what the others described in that she works and works and works. She pointed out that if there are opportunities where your career can be furthered, then attend! However, this is representative of a CEO position where there is no down time. Her lesson is if work is enjoyable, then maybe there's no need for such a separation of work and home.

Are post-docs for industry jobs worth it?

Dr. Kusko and Dr. Loud informed the audience that for industry careers, it is not always necessary, especially for smaller biotechnology companies. Dr. Loud was able to find an industry position in pharma directly out of her PhD, and this was enabled by having the exact skill set and expertise the employer was looking for (e.g. in-vivo modeling of autoimmune disease; immunology background), as well as a direct connection to the hiring manager as a result of a networking connection and mentor fostered through the last 2 years of her PhD work (good mentors are so valuable!). However, if there are considerations for remaining in academia, then a post-doc is advised. The post-doc experience will allow you to continue developing your roots into specific areas of science and can be used as a "pivot" if you are looking to switch fields from your PhD work but don't yet have the experience needed for an industry position you are interested in.

Any last-minute pearls of wisdom?

The panelists stressed the idea that you may think your career is going in one direction but do not push away opportunities in a different direction. Take risks. Keep learning. Keep networking. If you work towards your passions, stay attentive to your graduate studies, you will find out what you love to do.

For more information on industry positions, feel free to locate these and other alumni on our Alumni Mentoring Network (<https://www.bu.edu/best/career-development-services/alumni-mentors/>). Also, reach out directly to panelists Dr. Kusko (bkusko@immuneering.com), Dr. Loud (Jacqueline.loud@abbvie.com) and Dr. Rice (Lisa.Rice@modernatx.com).

We would like to thank all of the panelists for their time.