

Tips for Success in Academia When You are Different



I learned a lot by reading my student evaluations of my teaching. There are two kinds of critical evaluations. They are: 1) Ones that provide constructive suggestions on how to improve my teaching and 2) Nasty comments. I learned that I had to disregard the nasty comments and learn from the constructive criticism. Early in my career a student who was in more than one of my classes commented that I always gave the same lecture. The mistake I had made was using the same introductory slide for two different lectures in the two classes. I immediately made the introductory slides different.

In any job, it is important to keep copies of all your annual evaluations. Building your portfolio is also important. In academia published scientific papers are a major part of your work but there is often other work that is not formally published. If you have built a really innovative piece of equipment, make sure you photograph it. Other work you should keep copies of are: grant proposals computer code, scientific data, statistics programs, artwork, and drawings. Since I was weird, I had to sell my work and not myself. In my consulting work, I sold

my services as a livestock equipment designer by showing photos of completed projects and drawings.

I recommend keeping paper copies of your most important work that has not been published in either the formal academic literature or in a book. Electronic formats keep changing and ten years from now, it maybe difficult or impossible to retrieve the material. Print out photos and drawings on high quality paper and protect them from light. Keep a hard copy of your best work at BOTH your office and at home. We had a flood on our campus and both students and faculty had research work destroyed. The materials you save can be used to make a portfolio if you ever need to get a new job. The portfolio can also be used to show your work if you get into a conflict with your boss or colleagues.

Getting Along with Colleagues

When I worked on a team project, I learned that it is best for me to have a well-defined piece of project that is my responsibility. The scope of my area of responsibility should be defined at the beginning of the project. For example, I will write this specific section of the paper and get it done by a certain date. My colleagues on a jointly written report

sometimes made mistakes. I learned never rub their noses in them by calling them stupid. I worked on one project where I quietly corrected the mistakes that others had made. Our jointly authored scientific paper was successful. One must remember that the goal is to produce a good publication.

To get a long with colleagues, you have to make a decision about where your life is going to lead. Is political advocacy your main goal in life or is it professional success? Being successful at both is almost impossible. You have to make a decision on what is most important to you. In conclusion, you must always do your job with integrity. ■

Temple is an internationally respected specialist in designing livestock handling systems. She is also the most famous person with autism in the world today. She is the subject of the Emmy Award-winning HBO biopic *Temple Grandin*. She frequently writes and speaks on the subject of autism, sharing her personal experiences.



Publications That May Be Helpful

- Grandin, T. (2006) *Thinking in Pictures*, Expanded Edition, Vintage Press, Random House, New York.
- Grandin, T. and Panek, R. (2013) *The Autistic Brain*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, New York.
- Grandin, T. and Barron, S. (2005) *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships*, Future Horizons, Arlington, TX.