
Editorial

Continuing education in biotechnology

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The need for continuing education is present in many industries, and biotechnology is no exception. The biotechnology industry faces dynamic influences from diverse disciplines. Changes in any one of these areas can impact other areas. For example, legal and political rulings can impact the commercial potential of scientific applications; changes in public markets can influence the behaviour of private investors, and which business models are likely to receive funding; and, regulatory decisions, such as the guidelines for follow-on biologics, can influence operations from research through licensing.

Regular developments in these diverse areas mean that the biotechnology industry is always changing. To make matters more complicated, few people entering the industry received exposure to all these areas in their training, and there are no formal requirements for continuing education. Self-directed continuing education is therefore a pressing need for industry practitioners. How can one hope to keep abreast of all these changes? In a nutshell, keep reading and attend conferences.

There are many publications covering different facets of the biotechnology industry. Here at the *Journal of Commercial Biotechnology* we focus on in-depth analysis of elements influencing business strategy and management. Our tagline ‘Invest wisely’ extends beyond simple financial transactions; time and opportunity are two other scarce resources. Analytical sources such as the *JCB* are complemented by publications that provide excellent regular coverage of industry events. These news outlets provide an opportunity to utilise the insight gained from more analytical sources, but reading alone is not sufficient. Reading is a passive activity. It is essential to conduct your own primary research – one must learn to learn directly from others in the industry.

I have had the fortune of observing journalists from diverse beats for many years. One characteristic that has always impressed me is their ability to ask key questions of any expert driving its change. This is a skill I try to transfer to students and which I encourage anyone in the industry to develop. Want to learn about entrepreneurship? Go to a conference or networking event and ask a company founder how they started and what their current challenges are. Want a practical perspective on patenting, licensing, or financing? Find an appropriate attorney and ask them about the leading cases. Just as most people enjoy talking about themselves, most practitioners appreciate the opportunity to talk about their practice.

An added benefit of these casual conversations is that they can facilitate networking. Many people have a myopic view of networking, seeking to move rapidly from an initial meeting to doing business together. Neglecting chemistry and rushing the process of building trust and

familiarity frequently leads to failure. As with personal relationships, business relationships are strongest when they can develop organically. Starting with a non-committal interaction, such as the queries described above, can be a great way to build a relationship and develop trust (this is relevant to job hunting and business development alike), and can lay a strong foundation for future transactions.

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