

# **Career Dos and Donts**

*Navigating an Aging Research Career*

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# Agenda

- **Your Science**
- **Communications**
- **Management and Negotiations**
- **Survival in changing times**

# **Your Science: the conceptual framework**

- ✓ Connects ideas; mechanisms, outcomes, cofactors and modifiers
- ✓ A graphic illustration of your science
- ✓ Explains what is known, gaps, your aims or findings
- ✓ Orients the consumer of your proposal or manuscript or talk
- ✓ Build and modify as your research and the field progress

# Your Science: Feedback

- We are all blind to gaps and assumptions in our own work
- Seek critical feedback: what is not clear, assumptions, missing links, gaps
- Seek to give feedback to others; sharpens your understanding of communications
- Welcome feedback but don't let it psych you out...Persistence wins!!

# Communications

- Your work appears stronger and has greater impact when you communicate clearly
- How to write clearly: try the Gopen way (writing from the reader's perspective, sequence concepts from old to new, keep the action in the verb)
- Use high impact visuals in talks and documents
- Keep the focus on the take-home message

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## **The Science of Scientific Writing**

**If the reader is to grasp what the writer means,  
the writer must understand what the reader needs**

*George D. Gopen and Judith A. Swan\**

# Management

Academia and other large organizations have Byzantine and often hidden regulations and perverse incentives so you must learn the rules of the game

- ✓ Seek mentorship by a smart, experienced administrator
- ✓ Learn the HR game (job descriptions, interviewing, references)
- ✓ Understand how budgeting works in your place (interpretable reports, accounting practices, advanced planning)

Keep track of what is going on

- ✓ Plan data management in advance and monitor
- ✓ Be hands-on up front and periodically

# Smart Negotiations

- If you don't ask, you won't get it..
- Know what you want (not just a raise in salary...)
- Make your request feasible and desirable for decision makers
  - ✓ Earn it before you ask: plan and discuss in advance
  - ✓ Describe how your request is good for the organization
  - ✓ Provide a clear plan for needed resources
- If you want to evaluate your value on the market, be prepared to follow through

# Academic Medicine

## A house of cards in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

- **Where we came from:**
  - Clinical and federal research revenue improved academic flexibility to promote growth dependent on “soft money”
- **Where we are:**
  - As clinical and research revenue are squeezed, Medical Schools have few other resources to support their large faculty
  - It is no longer realistic to expect a large faculty to be self-supporting
  - Standards of “independent investigator” no longer realistic
  - The old career success strategies seem poorly fitted to current environment



# Academic Medicine

## A house of cards in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

- **Where we are headed:**
  - Medical School faculty size at risk to shrink
  - The current leadership are largely aging boomers- expect rapid turnover in the coming decade or sooner
  - Other than austerity budgets, academic leadership is not yet planning for the future

***You are our investment in the future of aging research***

- How can you thrive?
- How can we help you?

# The future of (aging) research

- Increasingly focused on funder priorities: RFA, RFP, PA etc
- Successful research is often more large-scale, making less room for small independent research programs
- PCORI and CMS- based in health systems with IT
- Young or midstage investigators need to develop a national reputation to become recognized as qualified to serve as PI of large studies

The shrinking of the “lone ranger” autonomous small research lab  
The evolution of a “company player” corporate/bureaucratic research infrastructure

# Solutions

- **Grow from inside a network:**
  - NIH translational or clinical trials or Program Project research: get into a successful group or network
  - Get involved with a healthcare system with good IT (become knowledgeable about IT)
  - Leverage to autonomy: ancillary proposals based in big studies
- **Go the old way toward independence**
  - Work at NIH
  - Propose <500k/year basic or mechanistic human studies with minimal confounding; “clean”
  - Try “two chronic condition” human studies
  - Do preclinical/early translation drug development
- **All: still need to understand your game, the players (program, reviewers), need a coach familiar with the inside**

# The great opening coming your way

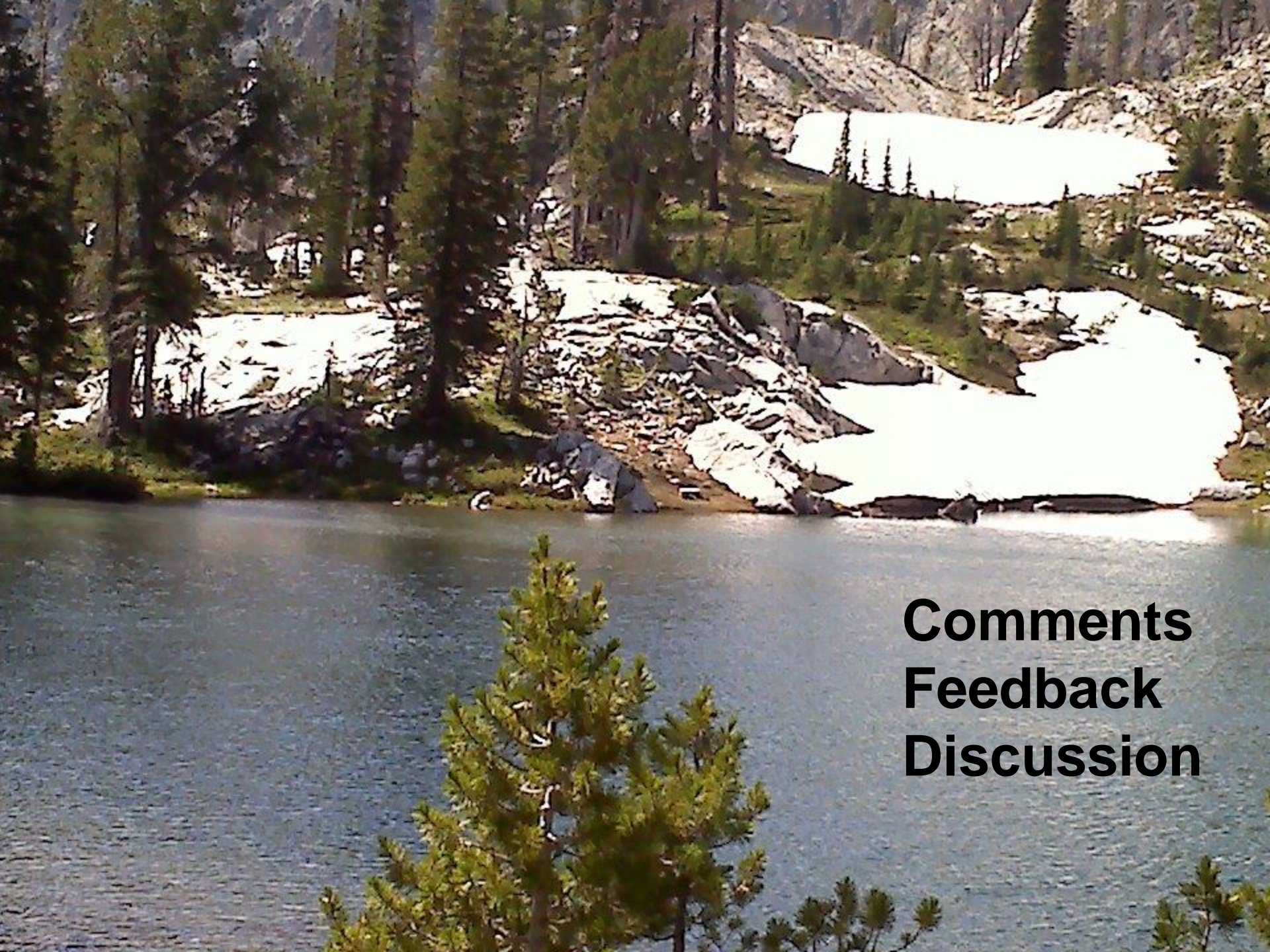
- Boomers currently dominate senior research positions
- Because they are well established, they are key to current successful funding of big studies
- Boomers are increasingly likely to step back or move on in the coming decade
- Makes room for you to advance or evolve toward more leadership roles...

# The new way: What can you do?

- Get inside large studies and networks as co-I or subproject leader
- Develop expertise in needed areas: novel molecular techniques, translational technologies, IT, computer modeling
- Prove yourself to your leaders with your responsibility, initiative, creativity; earn advancing responsibility and position
- Write ancillary studies and try for modest free add-ons
- Analyze and publish based on data from large studies
- Build your local and national reputation so you can be considered qualified for advanced responsibilities

# What can we boomers do?

- Commit to intentional and thoughtful ***succession planning***
- Facilitate evolving responsibility and visibility for high potential emerging leaders
- Plan for transitions from current national positions that are helpful for tenure and promotion among emerging leaders eg make room for new appointments to editorial boards, professional societies, study sections; perhaps with coaching
- Appoint emerging leaders as unofficial co-PI for “leadership training” without loss of new PI NIH benefit
- Serve as co-I and coach for first PI applications
- Let go, step down and give someone else a chance!!!



**Comments  
Feedback  
Discussion**