

Nine Lessons I Learned (The Hard Way)

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My problem: No time, no money, no sleep, no papers! (yet)

Tips to cope- in increasing order of difficulty

9. Never check email first thing in the morning.

Start an experiment or plan your day first. It's amazing how much time this can save you.

8. Do something- anything.

Small steps actually taken improve your quality of life better than big plans that are never put into practice. e.g. When I walk into the lab I first sit down and make a list of things to do. That includes everything- phone calls to make, transfections, cell culture, meetings etc. I've noticed that days when I don't do this are always a bit more stressful and chaotic.

7. Ask, ask, ask.

Ask for a technician's help, ask for people to take out plates over the weekend, ask your boss for any help you need or to attend a conference. If you get refused, ask again in a different way, at a different time. Be persistent (but nice, of course 😊). And always look for little ways to give back in return. People notice and appreciate it.

6. Take charge.

Nobody is obsessing about your situation as much as you! Try to take the initiative to improve some aspect of your life that you want instead of hoping somebody else will do it. Remember, as always, start small- little changes ARE valuable. Even one little change.

5. Make friends with your labmates- and your boss.

I can't tell you how much this has helped me. You may not get along with everyone. That's OK. Just try and see 1 or 2 good points in people. Interact with them keeping those points in mind- it will be easier to chat with them.

4. Keep your boss informed, in the loop.

Be visible. e.g. I have weekly lab meetings with my PI. I like this- not because I need help designing/planning my experiments but because (a) it shows that I've actually done something useful that week ;) (b) it saves her the trouble of having to constantly ask "so what's going on" and (c) oftentimes, discussing the data leads to new ideas for other cool experiments and gives me ideas for getting around technical problems.

3. Perfectionism prevents progress (Something is better than nothing).

Actually, I believe **perfectionism prevents success**. The fact that an experiment cannot be done perfectly or "correctly" makes us not do it in the first place. That's a mistake. Use cells that are slightly overgrown, try to salvage an experiment where you made mistakes, try to extract *something* from every experiment, even if it's just what not to do next time. Concentrate on what is doable and do that at least. Remember- an experiment done 80% well is better than one that is 100% not done!

2. Pick yourself up- again and again and again and again.

No stinking thinking. The minute you start blaming yourself/others/the situation- STOP. Immediately. **First** think of possible ways to solve/salvage the situation and *then* (much later) give yourself permission to rant (internally!) if you want. Having an emotional meltdown will not help one bit- ever. Get over it quickly and move on. Be brutal about getting over setbacks/disappointments ASAP. Stuff happens. Don't make it worse by imagining all the other stuff that **could** happen. Think "it will be better/work next time" or "let me try to do it differently next time" or "if I sit and think I can come up with an alternative to this". It makes you feel calmer.

1. Don't fight the moment.

This is the hardest part. I find mentally that most of the time I'm always either in the past or future. The present moment is almost always a vehicle to get to some future (ideal) place or take us back to past happenings. But we have the power to change our actions only at the present moment. In a difficult situation put emotion aside (do not think of past or future immediately) and try to see what the situation actually IS. If your boss is mad at you, accept the reality of the moment and see what you can do at THIS moment to address it. Don't fight the situation. It is

what it is. Accept it and use your intelligence and analytical skills to address the problem. Act wisely- and in the present!

If you do all these:

1. You'll publish papers in Cell (ha!). Just kidding. But...
2. You *will* increase productivity. You'll get more done (or at least the same amount done) in the same time with LESS STRESS. If it works for me it will for you.
3. You'll become (even just slightly) a calmer, more open personality and that wins more friends, reducing stress further and increasing productivity.

Finally, just because I put this list together doesn't mean I follow all the rules all the time. Far from it! Rule numbers 2 and 1 especially are the hardest. But I try. And it always helps, to some degree at least. I hope it helps in some way for at least some of you. Please feel free to contact me if I can help in any way, however small. Good luck!