Early Career Members

Standing on the Shoulders of (Industry) Giants: Part 1

by Christopher Boomsma

“If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

—Sir Isaac Newton, 1676

Mentoring is undoubtedly a critical part of a professional career. It, like the intellectual achievements of past and present researchers, helps us early career members work effectively in our fields of science and build upon the insights and works of others. Yet for those ASA, CSSA, and SSSA members considering or just launching a career in the private sector, it can be a challenge to find and engage an industry mentor, particularly one with extensive technical and/or management experience. Given the accomplishments, senior ranks, and crowded work schedules of these industry “giants,” these individuals may seem unapproachable or simply unavailable.

This is often not correct. Many of these individuals enjoy mentoring new or early career employees. Furthermore, numerous companies have excellent in-house mentoring programs that involve interaction with company leaders, peers, and even general industry or academic experts. Yet for those who do not have these resources available, initiating a rewarding mentoring experience can be a daunting challenge. This is particularly true for early career members with limited private-sector experience and personal connections. For these individuals, the commonly perceived “wall of secrecy” surrounding companies, their technology, and their employees can seem formidable.

Over the course of this year, the Early Career Members Committee will be publishing a set of articles in *CSA News* magazine in which I interview individuals who I consider “giants” in those fields of science directly related to ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. The composition of this panel is varied—some have public-sector experience while others have numerous patents; some have leadership positions while others are technical experts. Despite the panel’s diversity, you will see a core set of characteristics among these folks including an exceptionally strong work ethic; a willingness to tackle new, complex challenges; a proven track record of professional accomplishment; and a motivation to help others both within and outside of their organizations. I admit that the panel is biased to individuals engaged in those fields of science in which I routinely work, but I believe the comments provided by the interviewees will benefit all early career members.

The questions guiding each interview are designed (i) to highlight the various opportunities private-sector employment can provide and the career tracks a private-sector scientist can take, (ii) to show how private-sector employees can work with public-sector colleagues and the Societies and engage in public–private initiatives, and (iii) to enable industry “giants” to share key insights and “lessons learned” with early career members. My hope is that these articles will allow you to stand on the shoulders of these “giants,” thereby allowing you to build not only on their intellectual achievements, but also on their collective wisdom and experience. Enjoy, and don’t forget to email these folks if you have questions.

Interview with Marc Albertsen, Ph.D., DuPont Pioneer; marc.albertsen@pioneer.com

Boomsma: To introduce readers to you and your accomplishments, can you please describe your education, work experience, employer and position?

Albertsen: I am one of the Research Directors in the Agricultural Biotechnology organization at DuPont Pioneer. I lead Pioneer’s Adaptation and Crop Hybridization research group, which is a research group, we are working to expand crop adaptation and to increase the reproductive productivity of crops in general. We are also leading for two externally funded philanthropic, multi-partner collaborations, each with the goal of improving the lives of subsistence farmers in Africa. One is about improving the nutritional profile of sorghum for sub-Saharan Africa, and the other is about improving the nitrogen use efficiency of maize grown in eastern and southern Africa.

Before these roles, I most recently directed the Agronomic Traits Discovery and Validation Department in the development of maize with improved drought tolerance, nitrogen use efficiency, and yield and in the development of soybeans with improved yield. The department was responsible for developing and delivering genetics-based technology to lower

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