Message from the PDA Chair:

Happy New Year SOT Postdocs! All the SOT Postdoctoral Assembly board members and I wish you a successful and productive 2023. We hope that this new year brings exciting opportunities, big achievements, and success to all of our members.

Our mission as a PDA Executive Board and staff, who are truly working hard to make sure SOT has your back as we get ready to see each other in person again. The SOT has created a range of scientific sessions, events, and services to support postdocs in their professional development. As the Chair of the PDA, and on behalf of the PDA board, I am honored to welcome the new members to our postdoctoral family and invite grad students who are about to graduate to become an active member to provide a voice for postdoctoral scholars within the SOT, to serve as a platform for postdoctoral advocacy and education, to provide professional development and networking opportunities, and to promote the growth and success of postdoctoral fellows.

This year is another year of milestones despite navigating through a pandemic and a season of modifications and enhancements to postdocs and early career scientists. We have the privilege of coming together in person for our 62nd Annual Meeting. After a challenging year of virtual engagement, I look forward to this opportunity to connect with each and every one of our valued postdocs members and I am eager to once again connect with colleagues, friends, leadership and new members!

I extend an invitation to all SOT members and PDA partners to join us in Nashville from March 19-23, 2023, to participate in the scientific programs, educational workshops, and social events that will take place. Our annual meeting is a crucial opportunity to advance our collective knowledge, shape the future of toxicology research and practice, and engage with leaders in the field.

In this edition of the Post-y, we celebrate the personal and professional successes of several of our colleagues, as well as the recipients of the Best Postdoctoral Publication Award. Additionally, we highlight postdoctoral service opportunities that support diversity and leadership in toxicology, emphasizing our commitment to equity.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you all at the Postdoctoral Luncheon in Nashville in the coming weeks. Let us come together to celebrate our achievements and continue to advance the field of toxicology.

Sincerely,
Mohamed A. Ghorab, Chair of the PDA-SOT
Congratulations to the Best Postdoctoral Publication Award Winners!

Qiran Chen, PhD  
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL  
Chen, Qiran, Wei-Chun Chou, and Zhoumeng Lin. 2022.  
"Integration of Toxicogenomics and Physiologically Based Pharmacokinetic Modeling in Human Health Risk Assessment of Perfluorooctane Sulfonate."  
*Environmental Science & Technology* 56, no. 6 (March): 3623–33.

Isha Mhatre-Winters, PhD  
Florida International University, Miami, FL  
"Effects of DDT on Amyloid Precursor Protein Levels and Amyloid Beta Pathology: Mechanistic Links to Alzheimer's Disease Risk."  
*Environmental Health Perspectives* 130, no. 8 (August): 87005.

Alexandra N. Nail, PhD  
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY  
Nail, Alexandra N., Lakynkalina M. McCaffrey, Mayukh Banerjee, Ana P. Ferragut Cardoso, and J. Christopher States. 2022.  
"Chronic Arsenic Exposure Suppresses ATM Pathway Activation in Human Keratinocytes."  
*Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology* 446 (July): 116042.
PDA Endorsed Sessions

**Monday, March 20, 2:40 PM to 3:00 PM, ToxExpo, Hall C, Music City Center**

**Tiny Tox Talk: Postdoc and a Leadership Role: Why SOT PDA?**

**Education-Career Development Session: Leader’s Digest: The Art of Scientific Leadership**

*Chair(s):* Anke Tukker, Purdue University; and Mohamed Ghorab, US EPA.
*Primary Endorser:* Education and Career Development Committee
*Other Endorser(s):* Graduate Student Leadership Committee; Postdoctoral Assembly

**Tuesday, March 21, 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM, Room 202, Music City Center**

**Workshop Session: Computational Visualization Tools for Communicating Large, Complex Data**

*Chair(s):* Matt Martin, Pfizer Inc.; and Kim To, Inotiv.
*Primary Endorser:* Computational Toxicology Specialty Section
*Other Endorser(s):* Postdoctoral Assembly

**Wednesday, March 22, 8:00 AM to 10:45 AM, Room 201, Music City Center**

**Workshop Session: Peer Reviewing for Scholarly Journals: Best Practices, Tips, and Case Studies**

*Chair(s):* Windy Boyd, NIEHS/NTP; and B. Paige Lawrence, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry.
*Primary Endorser:* Postdoctoral Assembly
*Other Endorser(s):* Education and Career Development Committee; Graduate Student Leadership Committee

**Wednesday, March 22, 11:00 AM to 12:20 PM, Room 202, Music City Center**

**Education-Career Development Session: A Day in the Life of an Industry Toxicologist**

*Chair(s):* Madelyn Huang, Premier Consulting; and Stephanie Brocke, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
*Primary Endorser:* Education and Career Development Committee
*Other Endorser(s):* Postdoctoral Assembly; Regulatory and Safety Evaluation Specialty Section
# Activities by and for Postdocs

## Sunday, March 19th

**7:30 PM to 9:00 PM**

**STUDENT/POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR MIXER**
- All students and postdocs are invited to attend.
  - Complimentary refreshments and a cash bar will be available.
  - *(Free Reservation Required)*
  - **Davidson Ballroom B**

## Monday, March 20th

**9:30 AM to 10:30 AM**

**TRAINEE DISCUSSION**
- Plenary Session speaker Nandini N. Bumpus will meet informally for discussion with graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.
  - *(Free Reservation Required; Limited Seating; Students and Postdocs Only)*
  - **Room 401A**

**12:00 Noon to 1:30 PM**

**IN VITRO TOXICOLOGY LECTURE AND LUNCHEON FOR STUDENTS**
- *(Add-On Event; Limited Seating; Students and Postdocs Only)*

  *Dedication to the Use of In Vitro Alternative Techniques to Study Toxicologic Mechanisms: Case Study of Developmental Neurotoxicity*
  - **Davidson Ballroom A**

  **Lecturer:**
  - **Ellen Fritsche, IUF–Leibniz Research Institute for Environmental Medicine, Düsseldorf, Germany.**

## Tuesday, March 21st

**12:00 Noon to 1:00 PM**

**POSTDOCTORAL ASSEMBLY LUNCHEON**
- This luncheon is a casual event that encourages engagement and networking among postdoctoral scholars. *(Add-On Event)*
  - **Room 103**

**1:30 PM to 2:50 PM**

**CAREER EXPLORATION THROUGH SPEED INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**
- Groups of trainees will rotate through a series of short discussions with career representatives from academia, government, and industry.
  - *(Free Reservation Required; Limited Seating; Students and Postdocs Only)*
  - **Room 103**

## Wednesday, March 22nd

**2:00 PM to 3:00 PM**

**TRAINEE DISCUSSION**
- Medical Research Council Lecturer Emma Rawlins will meet informally for discussion with graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.
  - *(Free Reservation Required; Limited Seating; Students and Postdocs Only)*
  - **Room 401A**

## Various Days

**POSTER TOURS FOR TRAINEES**
- Provides students and postdocs with an opportunity to shadow an expert toxicologist and take part in critical evaluation of cutting-edge toxicology methods and research findings in a field of their choosing. This event also provides an outstanding mentoring and networking opportunity for guides, postdoctoral scientists, and graduate students. **Multiple Locations**
  - **Guide Sign up here**
Finding the Best Fit
Interviewing to Grow Your Career and Your Team
February 15, 2023 - 1:00pm to 2:00pm ET

No matter the sector, job seekers and employers both want a “best fit” outcome. Ideally, the best fit will ensure that the new employee has the greatest chance for professional growth while working seamlessly with the existing team. Recent events have underscored the importance of strategically seeking employment and hiring employees. A poor employee-employer match can prove more costly than a measured approach to finding a perfect match.

This webinar will cover finding the best fit between a potential employee and an employer in the pharmaceutical arena. The session will include two speakers, followed by a short Q&A session. The first speaker will focus on how job seekers can “interview” potential employers to determine if a position is optimal for future career growth. The second speaker will discuss how employers can determine if a candidate is a great potential fit for their teams. While all participants will take away valuable information from this webinar it will be of particular benefit to SOT trainees who may be seeking permanent employment for the first time.

Speakers

Betina Lew, PhD, DABT, ERT
Head of Toxicology and Biocompatibility
Johnson & Johnson

Jacqueline Kinyamu-Akunda, DVM, PhD
Sr. Scientific Director, Nonclinical Safety
Janssen

Moderators

Anke Tukker, PhD ERT – Vice Chair, Postdoctoral Assembly Executive Board
Lauren Walker, PhD – Postdoctoral Representative, Women in Toxicology Special Interest Group

Webinar jointly planned by the Postdoctoral Assembly Executive Board and Women in Toxicology Special Interest Group.

Registration is required, please use:
https://aim-hq.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W-mBHv7WTc-q7WjSUQhcxA
Pondering over Toxicology and Leadership Roles with a “Virtual Coffee”
By Mohamed Ghorab (PDA chair) and Anke Tukker (PDA vice-chair)

Anke (A): I am Anke Tukker (PhD ERT) and currently a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Aaron Bowman's laboratory at Purdue University (West Lafayette IN). Here, I study the long-term effects of developmental methylmercury exposure on human induced pluripotent stem cell (hiPSC)-derived neurons. I am also the vice-chair of the SOT Postdoctoral Assembly (PDA) and will transition into the role of chair. It is in this capacity that I came to know Mohamed. Since we are both from very different parts of the world and currently in different jobs and sectors, I wanted to get to know him better and ask him questions about his journey in toxicology and leadership roles. Thus, we sat down with a “virtual” cup of coffee and chatted. First of all, Mohamed, who are you and how did you get interested in toxicology?

Mohamed (M): Anke, it's a pleasure to chat today. To answer your question, I am Mohamed Ghorab, (PhD), currently working as a toxicologist Scientist at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSPP), Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) at (Washington, DC), where I performed the hazard characterizations and potential risk for a variety of agricultural and industrial chemicals to aid in human and environmental health and to determine safe levels for chemical use in dietary, residential and occupational settings.

I have also participated in multiple national and international efforts including the development of acute and chronic toxicity methods, guidance, and policy for validation and reducing the use of animals in chemical testing and the development of new approaches for risk assessment. I am also the chair of the SOT PDA. I am really grateful to be surrounded by many talented and amazing committee members with diverse scientistic backgrounds and great teamwork, sharing, and collaborating with all PDA board members through my tenure as chair of postdoctoral and early career at SOT.

Actually, my passion for toxicology started early at my senior year of my undergraduate in understanding the chemical contaminations, including pesticides, in a wide range of environmental systems, where my first exposure to applied chemistry research was through conducting graduation research project focusing on illustrating the possible impacts of chemicals on our everyday food. This passion on learning more about chemicals and pollutants released in the food chains and environment and their impact on human health drove me to choose chemistry as my major during my undergraduate studies at Alexandria University. As an undergraduate, I participated through a well-established laboratory within the Department of Pesticide Toxicology on a running research project to investigate the effect of pesticides on the environment and to determine the different mode of action using two methods of analyses during the summer internship. Subsequently, I was so excited to start my Masters degree right after the summer studies and a research project focused on the toxicological study of certain pesticides, determinate the residues, and metabolites and human health safety.
Furthermore, through my tenure at National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries (NIOF), I was granted a research fund by the PF7- E.U., to study and obtain more training in different techniques for determination, compositional distribution, and toxicity assessment of Pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the Northern lakes of Egypt.

In late 2014, I was eager to learn more about the fundamentals of Toxicology from the zoology and Animal Science point of view. Therefore, I joined Dr. Matt Zwiernik, Environmental Toxicology group, Wildlife Toxicology Lab (WTL), at Michigan State University via a PhD. When he offered me the chance to start a graduate under the Superfund project in Pine River, MI. In this part of the PhD journey at Michigan State University, I focused on initiating research on both the fates and effects of potentially toxic compounds and elements, particularly in the area of ecological risk assessment. Working in WTL has researched the movement, bioaccumulation, and effects of toxic substances at different levels of biological organization, ranging from terrestrial to aquatic and biochemical to the ecosystem.

After graduating, I started my academic training as a postdoctoral fellowship in the same lab with extensive research in the areas of environmental toxicology, wildlife exposure, individual and population health, multispecies toxicity testing, biochemical indicators of stress, fate, and effects of PAHs, halogenated hydrocarbons, including chlorinated dibenzo-dioxins, PCBs, brominated fire retardants and pesticides including DDT and was also able to interact more with mentoring undergraduate and graduate-level students from environmental toxicology and Animal Science majors.

Therefore, after Dr. Zwiernik decided to retire, I joined Dr. Jim Lazorchak group at US EPA’s National Exposure Research Laboratory (NERL), Office of Research and Development (ORD) in Cincinnati, OH, where I was a Research Toxicologist working as a contractor responsible for a number of acute and chronic toxicity projects at ORD’s Aquatic Research Facility. I also headed the Toxicology group as Team leader and played a key role in the continued development and validation of toxicity methods. Undoubtedly, I was lucky enough to work, learn and observe both Dr. Zwiernik and Dr. Lazorchak, leadership qualities and their ability, ambition, outstanding achievements in the environmental toxicology field and dedication to perform high quality research which always encouraged and motivated me to go to an extra mile! Now, it`s your turn Anke to tell me How did you get in this field?

Anke (A): First off, That’s a very interesting story! I took a strange path towards toxicology. Following my bachelor in Biomedical Sciences at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, I continued my education with a master in Latin American studies at the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands). I think you can say this was part of my rebellious phase in life. I wanted to do something completely different, see the world and spend some time on the continent I love.
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So, it was there at a coffee plantation in the mountains of Nicaragua where I was looking at environmental exposures and worker’s health that I realized that environment – health interactions was what I would love to study, but in a different way. I completed this program, but then started a master in Toxicology and Environmental Health, also in the Netherlands. For this program I had to do a nine-month internship which I performed in Dr. Remco Westerink’s lab. It was there that I became interested in neurotoxicology and electrophysiology. When he offered me the chance to start a graduate project in his lab I did not hesitate and accepted immediately. For four years I worked on the development of an in vitro screening model for seizure liability assessment using micro-electrode arrays and hiPSC-derived neurons. Following grad school, I accepted a postdoctoral position at Purdue. I must admit I never thought I would become a neurotoxicologist, but am absolutely loving it!

At this point, Mohamed and I have talked enough about our backgrounds and strong interest in toxicology. I was now curious why he decided to take up leadership roles. My own reasons were clear. I moved from the Netherlands to Indiana during the peak of the pandemic and did not know anybody. When another postdoc in the lab asked me to join Purdue’s postdoctoral association, I saw it as a great opportunity to get to know fellow postdocs and to learn skills that I thought would help me in my future career. Skills like working in a diverse group of people, networking and advocating for postdocs. I started out as council member, and became vice-chair the following year. Meanwhile I was also the postdoctoral representative for SOT’s NTSS. I then saw the call for nominations for SOT’s PDA and figured this would be an amazing opportunity to learn more about the inner workings of SOT as well as a perfect moment to get to know people from many different fields.

I also felt like this would be a great position to bring some specific postdoc needs to the attention of SOT leadership. Mohamed, why did you take up a leadership role?

Mohamed (M): Transitioning from academia to a governmental research setting was a significant adjustment for me, as I felt disconnected from the activities and groups that I had grown accustomed to. When I moved from Michigan to Ohio after almost six years, it marked a new chapter in my life. At that time, I saw the announcement for the Vice-Chair position at the SOT-PDA newsletter, and immediately contacted Sarah Carratt, PhD, the Chair of the PDA. I owe Dr. Carratt a big appreciation for her encouragement and discussing the logistics for the position. I am firmly convinced that, together, we can make a notable impact in the field of toxicology by advancing the field, promoting professional development, providing networking opportunities, and initiating collaborative research initiatives. Prior to that I served as the postdoctoral representative in the MSU-UNESCOs Environment group, and it was an amazing experience to connect with others from diverse backgrounds and everyday learn a new thing about a different culture and innovative solutions as well as develop students’ ability to create solutions for managing risk and reducing environmental contamination.
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**Anke (A):** I wondered what Mohamed’s main takeaways and what he learned in his leadership role. Also, I was curious whether he could already apply some of the skills he learned in his current job.

**Mohamed (M):** My experience in a leadership role provided me with a myriad of invaluable skills and insights that can be applied in various contexts. I likely developed a better understanding of the importance of communication and collaboration within a team, and the value of delegating tasks to ensure the most effective outcomes and responsibilities. Furthermore, I have gained a better appreciation of the need to remain organized, proactive, while keeping an eye on the overall objectives and mindful of the big picture while managing too many hats, by intersecting of science and policy in environmental safety and public health and always asking myself these questions: How can we use existing and emerging information to inform the development of better risk assessments and regulations? How much, and what kind of, information do we need to have before drawing conclusions about chemical safety and health risks from chemical exposures? It is quite possible that I was able to apply some of these skills in my current job as a toxicologist in the US EPA. For instance, my ability to effectively manage too many projects between science and policy would be beneficial when it comes to efficiently tackling tasks and projects within the department. Additionally, my enhanced communication skills would come in handy when working with other departments dealing with projects within the organization and stakeholders. Outside the US EPA, I am a visiting faculty/mentor at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, providing mentorship and skill development training for underserved undergraduate students in the STEM sciences through the Toxicology Mentoring and Skills Development Training Program (ToxMSDT).

Our goal is to create an access point for these students to enter graduate toxicology programs, and eventually join the toxicology workforce. Now, Anke, how about your leadership skills and how can you apply them in your current job in academia?

**Anke (A):** The things you mentioned sound very familiar. I agree that this leadership role helps you develop a deep understanding of the importance of communication. It also helps you to learn how to communicate with people from very diverse backgrounds, scientifically and culturally speaking. I also think it is good to learn early on in your career how to deal with different hats. At one moment I am supervising undergraduate students and doing wet lab work while the next moment I might be planning a career webinar for SOT. It definitely forces you to be able to switch between very different tasks. This is also an aspect that I really enjoy. I also developed a greater appreciation for everything that SOT is doing for its membership. Certain things seem very straightforward but turn out to be far more complicated in reality. Planning a webinar and making it fit in everyone’s schedule, including SOT’s calendar, is much harder than it sounds I now know. I also really enjoyed being part of scientific session proposal reviews as well as the best postdoctoral publication award.

I also felt a bit uncomfortable reaching out to strangers for help or with questions, but due to my task in PDA I am now over that fear. I learned that everyone I reached out to in the Society really wants to help and if unable to help themselves will point you in the right direction. My role in PDA has definitely taught me to be pro-active and that if you want to get something done, you can get it done!
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Mohamed and I are both very enthusiastic about our leadership role in SOT. We would both advise anyone to take on a leadership position if they have the opportunity. It is great for broadening your skillset with skills you will not be able to learn during graduate school or postdoctoral training. On top of that, it is a great way to get to know new people and to widen your network. Whether you want to stay in academia, move to government or aspire a career in industry, a leadership role will help you to get to know the right people and to acquire skills beneficial for your future career. If you want to become active in a leadership position, follow the newsletters from SOT’s Specialty Sections, Special Interest Groups and the PDA. They will advertize when they are seeking. Additionally, leadership roles at your current institute might be available. Thus, our main message for you is, get involved! And if you want to learn more about leadership skills needed in your future career, come to the PDA hosted session Leader’s Digest at SOT.

Hope to see you all there!
Mohamed and Anke
When I think of leadership, I think of the Letters to a Pre-Scientist (LPS) program, which was founded by teachers in 2010 to bridge the gap between low-income middle-school students and access to mentors in STEM fields. The teachers noticed that students saw scientists in movies or on TV, but because they didn’t know anyone personally, they didn’t see themselves as becoming one. The LPS program has been a huge success, with the program in the 2021-2022 academic year connecting 25 classrooms and 1650 student participants to STEM professionals. The great thing about the program is that every single student in a classroom gets matched to a pen pal so that no student in the class is left out.

The participation ask is pretty minimal. Matched students and their STEM professional pen pals each write 4 letters over the course of the school year, guided by topic prompts from the LPS program so that the students can learn about the career path of their pen pal, why they chose it, and any other hobbies that the pen pal would like share about their life that the student could connect to. The goal for the program is simply to expose students to people who work in STEM fields so that students can see being a scientist as an accessible career path. (Perhaps also a covert goal of the program is to create opportunities for more people to write hand-written letters - now an almost forgotten craft in the age of email!)

Overall, the leadership I'm writing about is not about me as the role that I and other STEM professionals are playing is more mentorship than anything - but about a need that the LPS program in general is filling to inspire potential scientists that otherwise might not consider this career path. Leadership in this program also comes from the teachers who connect their classrooms to the program, volunteering extra time to make sure that students are getting to participate in this opportunity. In case anyone reading this wants to get involved as a pen pal in the next academic year, you can sign up for the mailing list on their website at https://prescientist.org/volunteers/ to be alerted when that time comes around and follow the program on Twitter at @LettersPreSci.
The Beauty of Being Bad at Things
By Bevin Blake

During the early phases of the pandemic, many of us started to learn a new hobby. Mine was mountain biking, and it became a humbling and powerful teacher in learning how to appreciate being truly bad at something. This came at an ideal time as I was also transitioning into a completely new role as a postdoctoral toxicologist working in human health risk assessment at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Many folks who pursue an advanced degree do so because they are passionate about a particular field of study and often have impressive track records of success. It can feel very discombobulating to exit a PhD as an expert on your dissertation topic to then be abruptly placed back at square one when starting a new postdoc, job, or career change. This was certainly my experience. I went from doing bench-based toxicology research to risk assessment and felt very much like a fish out of water or, more accurately, like a road cyclist on a mountain bike. The many parallels in these experiences were fascinating to discover and seemed more broadly applicable to the process of Being Bad at Things. Here’s what I took away from my experience:

1. Recalibrating expectations
When we develop a certain set of skills, our baseline for what to expect from ourselves shifts according to our level of expertise. When we are Good at a Thing, we set the bar very high. So when we suddenly find ourselves Bad at a Thing, it can be really hard to accept our baseline is set far too high. Learning how to recalibrate expectations to be at a reasonable and appropriate level can be a powerful way to offset some of the shame, frustration, and annoyance that can come up when you feel like you’re flailing with a new task that “shouldn’t be that hard!!”

I look ahead at the trail sprawling out before me, vision tunneling in on a lopsided, sharp-looking pile of rocks haphazardly strewn across the middle of the single track. Deep breath in, deep breath out. I can feel my heart pounding in my ears. Pedal, push, pedal, push, I think as I reposition the crank arm of my mountain bike, steeling myself. With conviction, I push hard off the ground with my right foot and begin to pedal with my left, my right foot lifting up and perfectly connecting to the pedal. I spin my legs up to the correct speed and glance ahead at the rocks. You know what to do, I say to myself as the obstacle grows nearer. I look at the rocks, bracing myself for the correct choreography of movement to lift the front tire up onto the rocks and synchronously time the pedal strokes to maintain momentum over the precarious pile. I look at the rocks. And keep looking at the rocks. And... slam my front tire into the first one, instantly tumbling off the side of my bike onto the dirt and leaves. Oof.
Continued from page 11

As someone with a background in road cycling, I (very incorrectly) assumed it would be easy to learn how to mountain bike. After all, it’s still just riding a bike! I had relevant experience; the skills should seamlessly transfer. From the start, it was tough to admit how very wrong that assumption was, and even tougher to lower the expectations I had of myself. Similarly, when I started my postdoc, I felt that I had all the relevant skills necessary to transition from being a grad student researcher to a human health risk assessor. But everything felt so hard! Impossible, even! At first, ye olde imposter syndrome reared its ugly head and tried to convince me that they had made a mistake in hiring me and I was actually entirely unqualified and would eventually be found out. Once those thoughts were ushered away, it was much easier to realize that perhaps I was having such a hard time because I was expecting myself to operate at the same level as when I was finishing up my PhD. Which was a very unreasonable mindset to have, since at the end of a PhD most people have 4-6 years of experience in that specific role. We would never expect a first-year PhD student to be able to operate at the same level as a 5th year student. Recalibrating my expectations of myself was an important step in allowing myself to be a beginner again.

2. Celebrating the small things
Once expectations are recalibrated, it becomes a lot easier to recognize tiny victories that would have previously gone unnoticed. When we are Bad at a Thing, there is so much room for improvement and growth! When we expect ourselves to automatically be Good at a Thing, there is very little room for error. This is a tough place to exist when you’re learning something new. When I started mountain biking, I was so hard on myself that unless I executed a technical section of trail perfectly, it didn’t “count”. This perfectionist tendency also permeated the first year of my postdoc.

However, after crying on the trail more times than I’d like to admit, I started to realize this new adventure of learning mountain biking for fun was becoming anything but—and the culprit my attitude. Similarly, I had been feeling really down about my “insufficiencies” as a postdoc. After some reflection and helpful conversations with friends and colleagues, I decided to try a different approach: no accomplishment was too small to be celebrated. Sent an email? Score! Only crashed on the trail once instead of twice? Sick! Choosing to acknowledge your accomplishments, no matter how small or trivial, can be a wonderful way to shift your perspective towards a growth mindset. Because lots of tiny accomplishments lay a strong foundation for bigger ones down the road.

3. Finding joy in failure
It really doesn’t feel good to fail, I’ll be completely honest. I hate it. But, failure is a fact of life and an unavoidable side effect of learning something new, so better to befriend it than fight it. This is another way the growth/curiosity mindset can be utilized. As mentioned above, many of us struggle with messing things up and can be extremely hard on ourselves since we expect excellence, all the time. This mentality can really rob us of joy. It may seem like a big leap, going from feeling anger or shame in failure to instead feeling joy, but here are some ways to reframe thinking to allow for this shift:

Instead of: Oh my gosh, this document I just got back from my mentor/collaborators/colleagues is so marked up. Look at all those edits and comments... I’m so stupid! I can’t believe I did such a bad job on my first draft and was so far off the mark. How embarrassing. Now they all know how dumb I am… I should be better than this!

Try: Oh wow this document is really marked up! I wonder what type of feedback I received. It’ll be interesting to see where the disconnect was in my understanding of the task and what was expected. I will make a note of any questions I have and bring them to the next meeting. I’m glad I get to learn from this and improve for next time.
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The first scenario interprets the marked-up document as proof of failure in a very negative and self-deprecating way, whereas the second scenario interprets the marked-up document as an opportunity to learn in a more neutral way through using a growth/curiosity mindset. While getting critical feedback may not ever spark joy per se, receiving the feedback with a growth/curiosity mindset makes room for joy through creating a kinder self-narrative. My biggest accomplishment as a mountain biker has been giving myself permission to feel the joy of laughter when struggling to gain a new skill or overcome an obstacle. While it may not be socially acceptable to cackle at your desk when reviewing a document, it can be fun to let yourself smile when you see that someone corrected your typo to “organism” from, well... we've all made that mistake!

I'm still not The Best at mountain biking, and I'm still learning my way around human health risk assessment. I still struggle with negative self-talk and holding myself to unreasonably high standards. But simply being open to recalibrating my expectations, celebrating the small things, and finding joy in failure has helped make the journey of Being Bad at Things to Being Not so Bad at Things so much more enjoyable. It is my hope that reading this has helped you feel a little less alone and maybe a little curious about finding the beauty in being bad at things.
Becoming a Postdoctoral Leader: Opportunities and Resources
By Katelyn Russell

- **Society of Toxicology Postdoc Representatives**
  - Regional Chapter Representatives
  - Special Interest Group Representatives
  - Specialty Section Representatives
  - https://toxchange.toxicology.org/volunteeropportunities/i-volunteer

- **SACNAS Postdoc Leadership Institute**
  - Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science: https://www.sacnas.org/
  - Leadership Training For STEM Professionals in SACNAS

- **Alan Alda Center for Communication**
  - Women in STEM Leadership Program
  - https://aldacenter.org/professional-development/WiSLP.php

- **SPDB Torrey Pines Leadership Development Program**
  - sbpleaders.org

- **Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists**
  - Can be a judge virtually or apply to be in an in person judge/mentor
  - https://abrcms.org/index.php/become-a-judge

- **National Postdoc Association**
  - Run for a position on the postdoctoral council
  - Become a committee member
  - https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/page/Volunteer
SOT Job Search Resources

Join the SOT social network through LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter.

SOT Job Bank

The SOT has partnered with YM Careers to launch a new and improved SOT Job Bank. For those seeking new employment, the Job Bank offers additional YM Careers tools such as the Job Search Research Center, which features articles offering tips, advice, and instruction on topics like building and formatting your resume, interviewing, advancing your career, and navigating the digital world. YM Careers also offers a function wherein users can upload their resumes to the site for an expert evaluation to allow for a more influential resume. In addition, job-seekers can browse featured jobs on the Job Bank home page as well as view all listings, which can be sorted according to keyword and location for a tailored search.

Mentor Match

Connecting with a mentor is a valuable way to grow in your profession at any career stage. SOT is pleased to announce that the new Mentor Match System is open for mentees to enroll. Mentor Match allows participants to connect with mentors based on topics such as area of expertise, education/career development, leadership, networking, work/life balance, and more! Visit the SOT Mentor Match webpage for information on how to enroll.

Renew Your SOT Membership!

Daniel Luo, PhD, Membership Committee
Postdoctoral Representative, 2020-2021

Renewing your Postdoctoral membership provides unparalleled networking opportunities, recognition from your peers, and is a vital component of lifelong learning through continuing education, postdoctoral events, and SOT Annual Meetings. We encourage you to renew your Postdoctoral membership today!

If you have recently completed graduate or postdoctoral studies or achieved the requisite number of years or publications in the field, you may qualify to upgrade to the next level of SOT membership. Upgrade requires sponsorship by two Full Members and Membership Services is happy to help.

Benefits for both membership levels:

Leadership opportunities
- Participating as representatives for SOT Regional Chapters, Special Interest Groups, Specialty Sections, and Committees.
- Hosting academic sessions and webinars

Educational Opportunities
- SOT Annual Meeting sessions, CE courses, symposia, and workshops
- Webinars

Networking Potential
- SOT Annual Meeting
- Regional Chapters
- ToXchange online member community

Discounted Rates Exclusive to Members
- ToxSci journal subscription
- SOT Annual Meeting registration
- Registration for webinars and other meetings/events

Connection to News and Hot Topics
- Communiqué Blog
- Specialty Sections and Special Interest Groups

Additional benefit of postdoc membership:
- One free Specialty Section and Special Interest Group membership
- Postdoc awards for SOT, Specialty Sections, and Special Interest Groups

Visit the SOT website to determine what membership level is right for you. If you have any questions or need assistance renewing your membership, please email Membership Services at: sothq@toxicology.org or call 703.438.3115.