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Build Your Career In Science—By Crossing National Borders

If you are looking for a job and can't find one, perhaps you're not looking in the right place. In the beginning, the most natural place to look is in your own backyard. But the reality is that finding a job requires flexibility and mobility. Sometimes this means moving far away—even to another country. The downside is that this takes you away from what is familiar. The upside is that it can broaden your horizons, and best of all, you're employed.

How does one go about pursuing a career or educational opportunity outside of one's home country? That is the topic of the latest "New Niche" on *Science*'s Next Wave. In an open forum, which runs from 6 June to 1 August, scientists from all over the world will discuss their international career or educational experiences—both advantages and disadvantages—and will be available for discussion with the Next Wave audience.

This is one of a series of pages in *Science* about features on *Science*'s Next Wave, the AAAS/*Science* Web site for young scientists (www.nextwave.org). This story highlights an alternative career feature on "Careers Across Borders" in the "New Niches" section of the site, which begins on 6 June and runs until 1 August.

For the job-seeking scientist, the quickest route to success may be to look for jobs in countries where industries such as biotech are booming—and at least one of the presenters in our forum did just that. But once scientists land that position, they may find cultural differences, both obvious and subtle, that make the transition challenging. In addition, legal problems relating to immigration can add to the complexity. But most scientists who have worked in another country agree that the experience was well worth it.

"When I read about young scientists and careers," says Peter Tsao, a Canadian citizen and research scientist for Tanabe, a Japanese pharmaceutical company, "they always say how hard it is to find a job in the States, but I wonder if they ever look beyond." Tsao, a forum presenter, who has been at Tanabe for over a year, says that for him location is a secondary factor in considering a possible job: "First, I look at the job, and then I look at the location." This increases the possibility of finding a position: "In Japan or in other Asian countries, or even in Canada, biotech and pharmaceuticals are starting to boom, and there is a shortage of expertise and skills." So maybe, he says, "if people can look beyond their own borders," they will find more career opportunities than they ever imagined.

For Tsao, this strategy has paid off, but he says working in Japan takes some adjustment. For one thing, the Japanese work practice is "very different." According to Tsao, the Japanese emphasize consensus management. Almost everybody has to agree on a strategy before it is implemented. "And that," says Tsao, "takes a lot of time"—something Westerners might find frustrating. The advantage, says Tsao, "is that after they [make a decision], the implementation is usually very smooth."

Although the differences between the East and the West are obvious, there are also differences among Western countries that can take getting used to. Jasmit Sarrowa, a U.K. citizen and another forum presenter, got her Ph.D. in molecular biology from Kings College at the University of London and then did two postdocs in the United States, one at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the other at the National Institutes of Health. She says the biggest difference between the United States and the United Kingdom is the money: Here, "we could order radiolabeled oligos and get them the next day. That made it so much more fun to do science."

Sarrowa also says that in terms of scientific style, "the Americans seem more focused, whereas the Brits sort of seem to enjoy taking time to think about other things." That took some adjustment. But Sarrowa says that once she became used to it, she "actually enjoyed it. It was nice to get things done." Would she recommend that her British colleagues do a tour of duty in the States? Absolutely. "I would recommend anyone go to the States," she says, "because it's an amazing experience in how science can be done."

Unfortunately, scientists who want to come to the United States face some immigration challenges. But getting a visa or a green card is not impossible. According to Stephanie Marks, a New York City–based immigration lawyer and former U.S. immigration judge who offers her views in the Next Wave forum, there are different categories under which people can apply for visas, depending on the job and the individual's qualifications. Getting a green card can be more difficult than acquiring a visa, but, says Marks, people doing certain types of work may be eligible to apply for a national-interest waiver. "It's available to people in the sciences, arts, or in business," she says. Applicants must show that their work will result in improvements in health care, the environment, the economy, wages, working conditions, or use of natural resources—or that it will lead to more affordable housing. "It's kind of a grab bag of categories," says Marks. But in many cases, it's a bag that fits.

Although Americans may sometimes have an easier time going to other countries, they may face problems when they return home. Christopher Walentas, an American and a graduate student at Cambridge, did his undergraduate work at the University of Edinburgh. Walentas says he "applied on a whim" and got in. "I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer," he says, so he figured that this "would be a little something that I could do to sort of set myself apart." Walentas says his undergraduate experience turned against him when he wanted to return to the United States for an M.D./Ph.D. "In the States," he says, "you've got to fit into these little boxes. And if you don't fit, they've got so many people who do that they don't want to know about you—particularly for medical school."

The Next Wave forum presenters say their overseas work and educational experiences, despite any difficulties they have encountered, is invaluable. To succeed, say Tsao and others, you need to be flexible and keep an open mind. Perhaps it is these qualities that draw scientists to careers away from home to begin with, but regardless of what the attraction is, one thing is for sure: With the scientific job market being what it is, those who are willing to broaden their horizons will have the greatest chance of success.

–Nicole Ruediger

For more information on careers across borders, please go to *Science*'s Next Wave, on the World Wide Web at www.nextwave.org, and look under the "New Niches" heading on the home page. There you will find essays by scientists who have worked in foreign countries, along with resources to help you get started.