

Life Beyond the Lab

 simplyblood.org/2016/12/life-beyond-lab.html

ISEH Headquarters

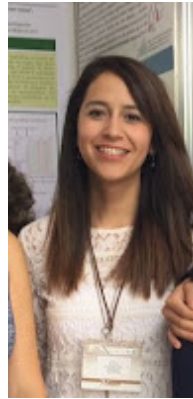
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What is a scientist? “A scientist is a person who wears a lab coat, glasses, gloves, has messy hair and works with green substances, and probably he/she is a bit crazy!” That was my 9 year-old niece’s answer when I asked her about how she pictured a scientist. Interestingly, that thought is not confined to children, in fact it is a popular image of a scientist (except for the green stuff) among non-scientists. But we, as scientists, know that this perception is far from the truth. We all know that science can be all consuming at times, at times absorbing 80% of our day. Between failed and successful experiments, biological discussions, database searches, statistical analyses that fall just short of significance, meeting with our supervisor to discuss all the details, and at the end of the day dreaming about all of the above. Without noticing, we start giving more and more of our time to science and less to our lives beyond the lab. We start cancelling meetings with friends, family and even with the gym. By doing so, we start getting closer and closer to the boiling point where stress turns us into the caricature of a scientist that my niece imagines. Maybe some of us can’t do anything about the messy hair, but I believe we could turn down the craziness a little bit. One important thing that some of us forget and I think we need to embrace is that there is **life beyond the lab**.

As a PhD student, we expect to and have experienced stress at its boiling point. Sometimes we feel apocalyptic about our project and our life as a scientist. But there is hope for all of us! The first step is to recognize and accept the workload we choose in this crazy business, and by acknowledging begin to search for productive ways to deal with the stress rather than reaching for crazy ideas. The key is a simple, universal truth that is not hidden at all: find a stress reliever. Find activities you enjoy to do outside the lab, like practicing a sport, doing zumba or body combat, or if you enjoy more calm stuff, read a good book or just stay home and watch Netflix. Whatever works for you!

What is important is to be aware that our work at the lab is just a part of our life; family, friends and mainly OURSELVES complete it. I had the fortune to meet and work with a Japanese researcher, a scientific leader in his field, who I consider the most successful person I have ever met. He seemed to have in his power the magic formula to balance every aspect of his life. How do I know that? He was always in a good mood! And he was able to transmit it to all around him. He said he did not like to take work home. He had a schedule: once his work time was up, he left the lab and science behind, and enjoyed his family and hobbies. There was a phrase he used to say a lot, “If I am doing great in my emotional life, I will succeed in every challenge I give myself, ‘cause if that works, everything will work!”. It sounds like an easy thing to do, but it requires discipline and hard work. The key is to organize work and life to carve out quality time for yourself and your loved ones. Once that is

established, everything will just take its course. In conclusion, keep on the hard work... in every aspect of your life!



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