Research Team Management Series

**Assembling and Managing a Successful Research Team –
What to Look for and What to Avoid**

Managing Research Teams Toolkit

A resource guide

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Quick Tips for *Recruiting* a Successful Research Team & Lab

The following has been adapted from Kevin Gardner, MD, PhD, Professor of Pathology & Cell Biology, Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons

Before the Interview

Do:
- ❑ Look for candidates in various settings (networking, referrals, local bulletin, Scientific Journal position postings)
- ❑ Establish evaluation criteria and stick to it
- ❑ Screen applicants:
  - ❑ Review all resumes carefully
  - ❑ Call references on the phone (do not contact over e-mail)
  - ❑ Rely on evidence
  - ❑ Seek different perspectives
- ❑ Schedule interview in advance and plan for about 30 to 90 minutes for the initial interview.

Avoid:
- ❑ Candidates with:
  - ❑ Inflated experience
  - ❑ Gaps in employment
  - ❑ Position and job hopping
- ❑ OPP (Other People's Problems)

During the Interview

Do:
- ❑ Ask open ended questions
- ❑ Allow interviewees to speak spontaneously and in detail
- ❑ Be aware of personal biases used during the interview
- ❑ Consult with your HR representative if an applicant needs reasonable accommodations

Ask About:
- ❑ Experience and skills
- ❑ Commitment and initiative
- ❑ Working and learning styles
- ❑ Time management
- ❑ Decision making and problem solving
- ❑ Interpersonal skills

Do Not Ask About:
- ❑ Personal details such as:
  - ❑ Marital status and marriage
  - ❑ Family plans
  - ❑ Religion
  - ❑ Sexual orientation
  - ❑ Number and ages of children
  - ❑ Childcare arrangements
  - ❑ Salary history
  - ❑ Conviction of any past crimes

After the Interview

Select Candidates Who:
- ❑ Are a good fit
- ❑ Have chemistry with your team
- ❑ Have expertise
- ❑ Express willingness to learn
- ❑ Have passion for science
- ❑ Have a strong work ethic

Avoid Candidates Who:
- ❑ Do not take responsibility
- ❑ Complain about co-workers and supervisors
- ❑ Delay or avoid answering questions
- ❑ Express anger
- ❑ Dominate the interview

Additional Resource: https://humanresources.columbia.edu/toolkit

Office of Faculty Professional Development, Diversity & Inclusion
ps.columbia.edu/faculty-development/faculty-diversity

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Quick Tips for *Leading* a Successful Research Team & Lab

Do:

- ☐ Be accessible
- ☐ Lead by example
- ☐ Delegate properly
- ☐ Match responsibility with authority
- ☐ Hold weekly meetings
- ☐ Communicate projects clearly and in details with the lab team
- ☐ Review lab issues
- ☐ Seek opinions from the lab members
- ☐ Hold one-on-one lab meetings every 1-3 months to discuss performance, expectations and mentoring needs
- ☐ Organize informal get-togethers
- ☐ Motivate your team:
    - ☐ Recognize and celebrate accomplishments
    - ☐ Match skills with competence to the task
- ☐ Focus on the interest of the lab as a whole

Manage Conflicts:

- Acknowledge and address conflicts comprehensively
- Recognize your team members' personality types
- Be a good facilitator
- Encourage cooperativeness and compromise
- Promote open and honest conversations
- Listen to both parties behind closed doors

Resources:

- How to give difficult feedback:
  http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2012/03/12/how-to-give-difficult-feedback/
- Weiss, J & Hughes, J. (2005) Want Collaboration? Accept—and Actively Manage—Conflict. Harvard Business Review:
  https://hbr.org/2005/03/want-collaboration-accept-and-actively-manage-conflict

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Questions for Interviewees

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Screening Applicants
Questions to ask references:

- ❑ Why are they leaving their position?
  - ❑ Are they reliable?
- ❑ What are their strengths?
  - ❑ Is their data always publishable?
- ❑ What are their weaknesses?
- ❑ Do they show initiative?
- ❑ What were you most disappointed in?
- ❑ Would you hire them again?

🚩 Red Flag Responses:

- ❑ "You will be lucky if you can get this person to work for you."
- ❑ "First, I want to say this is a wonderful guy, great personality, everybody likes him, but…"
- ❑ "With a little more encouragement this person will blossom."

The Interview
Questions to ask candidates:

Experience & Skills
- ❑ What are your most significant accomplishments?
- ❑ What part did you play in different projects and publications?
- ❑ Did you bring any new technologies to the lab?

Commitment & Initiative
- ❑ Why do you want to work in my lab?
- ❑ Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- ❑ What kind of projects are you interested in?
- ❑ What new technologies do you want to learn? Why?
- ❑ How do you define your field?
  - ❑ Do you want to stay in this field?
- ❑ How do you stay current in the field?
- ❑ What projects have you worked on?
  - ❑ What were your goals?
  - ❑ What were the results?
- ❑ Can you tell me about any projects where you took initiative?

Working & Learning Styles
- ❑ What motivates you to work?
- ❑ Would you prefer to work on one project or several projects at the same time?
- ❑ Do you learn better from books, hand-on experience or other people?
- ❑ Can you tell me about a project that required a team effort?
  - ❑ How did it turn out?
  - ❑ Did you lead the project?
  - ❑ Did you want to lead the project?
- ❑ How often do you help others?
  - ❑ What percent of your time do you spend helping others?
- ❑ If you encountered a problem in the lab, would you ask someone for help or would you try to deal with it yourself?
  - ❑ Has this ever happened?
  - ❑ What was the result?
- ❑ Are you willing to work after hours or on the weekend? (Can't ask this question to private or state employees.)

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The Interview (continued)

Time Management
- ❑ How do you prioritize your work?
- ❑ How do you handle things when you have two different priorities competing for your time?

Decision Making & Problem Solving
- ❑ What is the biggest challenge in your current position?
  - o How are you dealing with it?
- ❑ Can you tell me about a decision that resulted in unexpected consequences? Good or bad?
- ❑ Can you give me an example of a situation where you found it necessary to gather other opinions before you made a decision?
  - ❑ What factors did you weigh in making the decision?
  - ❑ Whose opinion mattered more to you?

Interpersonal Skills
- ❑ How important is it for you to be liked by your colleagues? Why?
- ❑ If you heard through the grapevine that someone didn't care for you, what would you do, if anything?
- ❑ How do you think you respond to criticism?
  - ❑ Can you tell me about a situation in which your work was criticized?
  - ❑ How did you rectify/correct things?
- ❑ Can you describe a scientist whom you like and respect?
  - ❑ What do you like about the person?

Wrapping up the Interview
- ❑ What is your timetable for leaving your current job?
- ❑ Is there any other information that you would like to add?

The Evaluation
What to Look for:

- ❑ Are they interested in the position?
- ❑ Do they get along well with other team members?
- ❑ Are they a good fit for expertise?
  - ❑ Have they been productive and are they willing to learn new skills?
- ❑ Do they have enthusiasm, persistence and follow-through?
- ❑ Are they willing to do what it takes to answer your questions?
- ❑ Do they keep good records?

What to Avoid:

- ❑ Are they unwilling to take responsibility for something that has gone wrong?
- ❑ Do they complain about their advisor and co-workers?
- ❑ Do they demand privileges not given to others?
- ❑ Do they challenge, delay or avoid answering questions?
- ❑ Do they try to control the interview?
- ❑ Do they use sarcasm or humor?
- ❑ Do they express anger of any sort?
- ❑ What is their body language negative?

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Additional Resources

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs' mission is to holistically support and assist Columbia University Postdoctoral Research Scientists, Scholars, and Fellows in their professional training and development; to offer in-depth guidance and resources to the Columbia University community on matters pertaining to postdoctoral affairs.
Website: https://research.columbia.edu/office-postdoctoral-affairs

Resources for PIs
This site provides resources such as appointment letters and requirements and mentoring resources for PIs who wish to hire postdoctoral fellows.
Website: https://research.columbia.edu/faculty-and-administrators

Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
One of the nation's oldest and most distinguished graduate schools, GSAS confers graduate degrees in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Our renowned faculty works with students to cultivate advanced knowledge and offer preparation for a variety of careers.
Website: https://gsas.columbia.edu/

The Columbia University Compliance Hotline
The Hotline serves as a channel for employees to report or seek guidance on possible compliance issues. It is supported by a third party vendor and staffed by professionals. It is available to Columbia personnel through the telephone and the internet with the option to report anonymously.
Website: https://compliance.columbia.edu/hotline

Readings of interest:

- What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team. *NY Times*: www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. doi:10.2307/2666999 https://www.jstor.org/stable/2666999?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- Lee, A., Dennis, C., Campbell, P. (2007). Nature's guide for mentors, *Nature*; 447: 791-797: https://www.nature.com/articles/447791a
- Guide to Best Practices in Faculty Mentoring: A Roadmap for Departments, Schools, Mentors and Mentees, Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity and Inclusion, Columbia University: http://facultydiversity.columbia.edu/files/viceprovost/mentoring_best_practices_1.pdf