

# Insights and Strategies for Career Development

## MODERATOR:

**Mary K Billingsley** 

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**Ranganathan** 

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## SPEAKERS:

**Lauren Fischer** 

Deputy Managing Editor  
JAMA Network  
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## REPORTER:

**Erin Russell** 

Assistant Editor  
Canadian Medical Association  
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Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

**Tom Lang** 

Principal  
Tom Lang Communications and  
Training International  
Kirkland, Washington

This session delivered insights and traditional and non-traditional strategies for career development from editorial, production, and freelance perspectives.

Lauren Fischer has worked for the JAMA Network for 17 years—she started as a manuscript editor and has recently been promoted to deputy managing editor. She kicked off her presentation by announcing “*There is no game plan!*” when it comes to career development. While there may be no game plan, Fischer provided the audience with a number of useful suggestions for career advancement from the more traditional (e.g., join a professional organization, keep up with technology) to the less traditional (e.g., organize happy hour). Three key points from her talk were:

- Learn the hard stuff, and your colleagues will think you’re a genius. “It’s important that you give yourself permission to be the authority on a given emerging topic” (e.g., copyright, conflicts of interest, statistics, ethical issues, legal issues).
- If you’re ever asked in a job interview, “If you have a style question you don’t know the answer to, how would you solve it?” do not answer, “Ask my manager.” Fischer implied she would not consider hiring anyone who gave this answer.
- In work, as in life, it’s important to have a big-picture view. Specifically, it may help to see things from your

boss’ perspective. His or her goals are different from yours and anything you can do to help will not go unnoticed.

Rajashree Ranganathan has been with the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) for 10 years and has worked her way from production editor to journals production manager. To excel in the field of production, she acknowledged that a candidate requires certain hard qualifications (e.g., academic qualifications, experience, technical skills), but equally important are the soft skills such as personality, earnestness, and adaptability. While we all know to list our hard skills in our resume, employers are just as interested in our soft skills, which should be highlighted in a carefully worded cover letter.

As communication and collaboration are key to successful journal production, Ranganathan’s team hosts an annual production workshop where all staff members contribute presentations on assigned workflow topics. This gathering leads to better understanding of what colleagues are working on and can even help to improve efficiencies. The workshop is so popular that this year they plan to invite associated departments to discuss editorial issues, such as peer review. Ranganathan concluded her presentation with an image of a tree branch and urged the audience to reach out and grow: “Growth is not always vertical; do not discount lateral growth.”

While Fischer and Ranganathan addressed insights and strategies for career development in a large, structured work environment, Tom Lang was invited to discuss career development when you’re “on your own.” For the past 17 years, he has been principal, Tom Lang Communications and Training International. Those of you who work for medical journals may be familiar with his book, *How to Report Statistics in Medicine*. Lang echoed the sentiment of the earlier presentations that it is important to let yourself evolve: “Instead of looking for specific career advice, consider developing qualities that will prepare you to take advantages of opportunities as they arise,” he said. As an independent consultant, Lang provided some useful tips for marketing oneself:

- What you call yourself makes a difference; who makes more money, freelancers or consultants?
- You’re not in the writing and editing business. You’re in the “make-the-client-look-and-feel-good” business.
- Stay current.

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- Network, network, network.
- Underpromise and overdeliver.

He reminded us all of what we know to be true of all consumers: "Clients only buy two things: Solutions to problems and good feelings."

Moderator Mary K Billingsley opened the floor to questions, and the audience all seemed to be asking the same thing:

1. My team is constantly pressed for time. How do you make time for professional development?
2. My organization does not really value development. How can I push the leadership team to make it more of a priority?

In response, the speakers sympathized with this common predicament (lack of time or support). Fischer and Ranganathan noted that development does not have to require as much time as you might think and an initial investment in professional growth serves well in the long run. Lang suggested employees find a way to pitch the development opportunity to their employers as either a solution to a problem or a good feeling. Billingsley reminded the audience it is important for employees to demonstrate return on investment. For example, be sure to tell your employer all of the great things you learned at this CSE annual meeting!