What are the top 5 things essential for your success?

At the SfN Annual Meeting in San Diego, in November, 2007, more than 200 women at all career stages met to network, be inspired by a terrific talk by SfN President and scientist extraordinaire, Dr. Eve Marder, enjoy lunch together at tables with women of all career stages, and discuss the top 5 things that are essential for success. The discussions were lively, and there were as many definitions of “success” as there were suggestions for obtaining it. The essentials could be grouped into three general areas: mentoring, career issues and personal qualities, summarized below.

Mentoring

- Have a good mentor -- selecting a good advisor(s) who is/are accessible and supportive at all stages of your career; select a mentor who has been trained or who has demonstrated mentoring skills.
- Select good mentors who balance scientific and personal lives.
- Build a peer group to support you within your career.
- Learn how to use / take advantage of the help that is offered.
- Generate the desire for people to help you.
- Become a good mentor yourself, so that there can eventually be reciprocity in your mentoring relationships → networking.
- Become a role model for high school and undergraduate young women, encourage them to choose science as a career.
- Build a support system yourself, rather than accepting what you’re given.
- Surround yourself with like minded people who can support you in and out of scientific life.

Career issues

- Learn how to build a good story and sell it – then do both of these.
- Fight dogma – do not be afraid to do what others say cannot be done.
- Careful career planning – plan your own career so that you can build in the flexibility you need yourself; start doing this from the beginning of your graduate training; become independent as soon as possible so that you can organize your lab life and personal life to fit each other.
- Set important short, mid and long term goals that are meaningful to you and take stock regularly.
- Prioritize.
- Enjoy the research that you’re doing; be passionate about it.
- Learn how to say “no.” If someone says “get back in the box” (conform) - tell them “no.”
- Find allies rather than fight enemies; pick your battles wisely.
- Develop good communication skills, and use them early and often.
- Learn how to network – “how did you prepare for / get that job?”
- Learn how to write grants; actively seek help in this area if needed.
- Become a skilled teacher.
- Collect information about alternative paths.
- Learn how to ask for a raise, and don’t be afraid to ask.
- Work against the stereotype that having children is detrimental to productivity.
- Select places to work that have good child care options nearby or that suit your lifestyle.
- Own a good power suit (in red or blue).

Personal qualities

- Strive to be happy.
Focus on what’s good in your life
Identify personal strengths and weaknesses
Develop the ability to speak up
Develop the ability to argue in a constructive fashion
Dare to make your own mistakes
Enjoy dealing with challenges
Develop a thick skin – don’t take criticism personally
Learn from your failures
Become good at multi-tasking
Have good time management skills
Have self confidence – not taking “no” for an answer; believe in the strength of your convictions
Balance between scientific life and private life
Have multiple interests
Creativity
Self discipline
Passion
Dedication
Perseverance, patience
Maintain perspective
Get sufficient sleep
Maintain good health
Have a supportive and geographically flexible partner; determine level of support / understanding of career commitments prior to marriage
Understand that you can have it all – just not at the same time