

## **TIBBS Career Blitz - January 2012**

### **Career Profile of Biotech Industry Researcher: Jimmy Smedley, PhD**

#### **What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?**

My current title is Group Leader/Scientist II. I have worked in this role since July 2010 (~1.5 years). Prior to that, I was a Scientist I at KBI from June 2009-July 2010.

#### **Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?**

I received my PhD from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and it was in the Molecular Virology and Microbiology Graduate Program, which was under the umbrella of the Interdisciplinary Biomedical Graduate Program. Prior to my work at Pitt, I also earned a Master's Degree in Biology at Duquesne University.

#### **Did you do a postdoc?**

I was an Intramural Research Training Award Fellow at NIEHS in the Laboratory of Structural Biology for ~2 years.

#### **What are your main daily responsibilities?**

I have two major responsibilities as a Group Leader in the Biopharmaceutical Development Department. First, I serve as technical/scientific lead on all data that is produced by my team of analytical biochemists. This includes data interpretation, analysis, method/instrument troubleshooting, and occasionally some bench work. The second major responsibility is project/client management. Our group maintains an account of ~10 individual client-projects, and each requires oversight of timelines, budgets, weekly teleconferences, and procurement of future business and opportunities. I spend about 70% of my time doing project administration, and about 30% doing scientific analysis.

#### **What are the keys to success in your career field?**

The CRO industry is very fast-paced and dynamic. The ability to quickly change directions and adapt to new projects, clients, instrumentation, molecules, strategies is critical in being effective and profitable as a company.

#### **What were the most important factors in choosing your career path?**

A critical observation I made in graduate school was that my narrowly-focused experience on a single protein toxin that causes food poisoning was largely irrelevant in the context of a career in the biotech industry. While I had a strong molecular and protein chemistry skill set, I knew I had to change fields to be more directly marketable to industry. Therefore, I sought postdoctoral positions in

protein mass spectrometry, since this field was quickly rising in all disciplines. I accepted a postdoc at NIEHS doing mass spectrometry, having never run an experiment on (or even seen) a mass spectrometer before. After several months of training, I was able to independently work on MS-based research projects, and all the while accumulating skills that were highly marketable in the biotech industry. I was hired with my current company, KBI Biopharma, after ~ 2 years as a postdoc at NIEHS, largely because of the experience and training I received there.

**What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?**

As I mention above, I think it is crucial to look further ahead than you are comfortable. Look where you want to go, then find jobs that will enable you to get there. It can be tempting to find a postdoc lab that does very similar things to what you are doing in your graduate lab now, perhaps a close collaborator, or an analogous system. Despite how important you think your current research is, do not be afraid to drop it to gain skills that will be more applicable to the job you ultimately want.