

The Newspaper for the  
Life Sciences Professional

**Publisher and Editor-in-Chief**  
Eugene Garfield

**Associate Publishers**  
Alexander M. Grimwade  
Scott Shoemaker

**Editor**  
Barbara Spector

**Managing Editor**  
Audra R. Albert

**Senior Editors**  
Steve Bunk  
Laura DeFrancesco

**Associate Editors**  
D. Shane Beck  
Stephen P. Hoffert  
Paul Smaglik

**Contributing Editors**  
Robert Finn  
Billy Goodman  
Ricki Lewis

**Photo Editor**  
Lynn Gambale

**Creative Director**  
Annmarie Pavone Durand

**Art Director**  
Christa L. Barlow

**Controller**  
Robert G. Jordan

**Adviser to LabConsumer**  
Thomas F. Unger

**Editorial Advisory Board**  
Joshua Lederberg (Chairman)

Baruch S. Blumberg  
Robert L. Brent  
Jaleh Daie  
C.K. Gunsalus  
Roald Hoffmann  
Gerald Holton  
Lovell Jones  
Sheila Moriber Katz  
David Kritchevsky  
Louis Lasagna  
Robert K. Merton  
Louis Padulo  
Jane Polston  
Bassam Z. Shakhashiri

**Home Office:**  
3600 Market St., Suite 450  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-2648  
Tel.: (215) 386-9601 • Fax: (215) 387-7542  
E-mail: info@the-scientist.com



by C.K. Gunsalus

### Lessons From The Trenches

Does your department have a bully who routinely belittles and berates the support staff or rules his or her students through fear and intimidation? Do you have a colleague whom you've learned not to trust on matters small or large? If this conduct is going unaddressed, you are party to a pattern that is inimical to an academic community, because academic communities rely upon truth, trust, and collegial behavior to function well. Alone, you may not be able to change this behavior, but you can contribute to a solution by thinking differently about the importance of character to an academic community—and then acting on those thoughts.

I am not suggesting that entry-level professionals or junior colleagues commit career suicide by taking on the department powerhouse alone. I do believe that department heads and senior colleagues must consider whether their culture needs improvement in this respect—and act if it does. Such actions need not be dramatic or instantaneous. In fact, if the culture is significantly out of balance in favor of an uncivilized heavyweight, recovery probably will require a long, slow process of incremental changes. But it must start somewhere. Even junior scientists can influence their environments more than they suspect by making it known to those in power that they value and respect principled actions and judgments.

My work includes providing information and resources for faculty members taking on administrative duties and helping to resolve problems when standard procedures aren't working. The nature of these problems varies, of course, but a remarkably large number of problems resistant to easy resolution seem rooted in abusive or deceptive conduct that has been tolerated or accepted over long periods. Colleagues who have similar responsibilities in other universities report seeing the same thing. So I think it's time to talk more directly about the effects of character upon conduct and how best to enforce high positive standards.

Let's start by talking about what I don't mean. I don't mean making moralistic judgments about people's personal lives. I also don't mean condemning conduct in a professional setting that happens to be unusual or outside the way most people act. We all know driven people who accomplish more than others precisely because they don't permit obstacles or distractions to get in their way. In a university, it's critical to overlook idiosyncrasies to the maximum extent possible and to tolerate a wide range of behavior because our long-term interests are best served by putting our focus upon achievement and quality of ideas. But when personality traits involve the consistent abuse of power or a propensity for lying, we must draw the line.

When talking with scientists about ethical issues, I'm frequently told that it is futile to incorporate character-related issues into postgraduate professional training, because people learn their morality from their parents or not at all. I think that attitude is self-defeating and not a sensible basis for action.

I agree that turning a practiced liar into a paragon of probity is not very likely. But that doesn't mean you need to hire a liar as a colleague or to work in your lab. Neither should it keep us from setting standards, establishing clear expectations, and providing consistent responses to a person who shades the truth or who may not realize the importance of direct, straightforward communication in the academic workplace. (Naturally, when we invite people from other cultures into ours, we assume the responsibility for providing information about our rules of conduct.)

Untruthful behavior can range across a broad spectrum. It may be something as simple as discomfort with admitting error or it can be the more fundamental problem of a willingness to say anything to win an argument or perk. At its most extreme (and, thankfully, rare) manifestation, it includes the aberrant act of falsifying data or scholarship.

Universities are magnets for people who

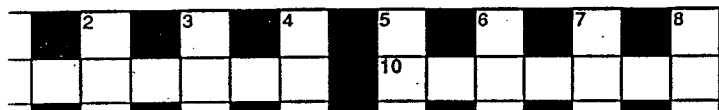
are both very smart and aggressively ambitious. My colleagues and I who help dysfunctional lab groups or warring departments frequently encounter situations in which one member has become essentially unsupervised through willingness to cross normal boundaries of civilized conduct. If temper tantrums cause everyone to back away, an ungoverned personality can run roughshod over an entire work group. Just as bullies on the playground must be challenged, so must those in the workplace. And the earlier the challenge comes, the easier it is to keep a problem from spinning out of control.

Behavior that has been tolerated for years will take much more effort to modify safely than behavior that is confronted in its earliest stages. We all know that free speech doesn't encompass the right to yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater. We must internalize—and act upon—the concept that academic freedom is not a license for disruptive conduct that impedes the work of others or that causes fear for personal safety.

Addeane Calleigh, the editor of *Academic Medicine*, has called my attention to the possible relevance to our community of what the New York City Transit Police learned from stopping fare jumpers on subways. Fare jumpers are those who vault the turnstiles to avoid payment. The police found that a willingness to jump the turnstile often turned out to be coupled with more serious lawbreaking, like carrying a weapon. So stopping fare jumpers had far-reaching—and beneficial—consequences.

Clearly, not everyone who cuts an ethical corner will fabricate data or plagiarize other people's work. But where the lines for acceptable conduct are clearly known, widely observed, and effectively monitored, it just may be that misdemeanors, and larger crimes as well, will diminish. Surely we would all benefit. ●

C.K. Gunsalus is associate provost at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.



BY ERIC ALBERT  
E-mail: ealbert@world.std.com