**Q&A**

**What career lessons do you pass on to young scientists?**

Advice can be beneficial, especially when it comes from someone who has been in your shoes. Here, four HHMI scientists offer words of wisdom that are equally applicable inside or outside the lab.

–Edited by Nicole Kresge

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**Erol Fikrig**  
**HHMI Investigator**  
**Yale University**

I encourage young scientists to enjoy the process of scientific inquiry for as long as they can. It might be for a summer, a year, a decade, or, in some cases, a lifetime. As careers develop, there are competing challenges that demand attention. If a scientist gets to the point where less than two or three hours of each day are devoted to considering scientific questions and designing experiments, then it’s time to reflect and, hopefully, reorganize.

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**Vivian Cheung**  
**HHMI Investigator**  
**University of Michigan**

Find what you love to do. To quote Steve Jobs, “Keep looking; don’t settle.” Passion gives you strength to persevere and reasons to care. Invest time and be genuine in the search. Life is full of unexpected things – some good, some bad – though it is never clear in the moment what may be good or bad in the end.

If you love what you do, you will dive in and accomplish what is needed, and you will do it well. This is particularly challenging today, when the emphasis seems to be on speed rather than perfection. To achieve excellence, you have to care deeply. The results will be rewarding.

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**Tanya Paull**  
**HHMI Investigator**  
**University of Texas at Austin**

Choose your research questions carefully. What are the most important questions that need to be answered in your field? What are the critical experiments that could revolutionize your area of research? Is it possible to answer any of these questions, and are any of them uniquely answered with the skills, information, and reagents that you have?

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**Vivek Jayaraman**  
**Group Leader**  
**Janelia Research Campus**

My own tortuous career path took me from aerospace engineering to insect neurobiology. I tell people who are uncertain of what they want to do to take their time figuring it out – a career isn’t a race. If you’re going to spend most of your life working on something, it had better be something you really care about and enjoy doing. Once you know what “it” is, I think it’s important to acquire the confidence to do things your own way. Listen to expert advice, but, ultimately, hone and trust your own scientific instincts.