

To a Scholar, Mentor, Leader, and Friend

A close friend of mine died recently. His name is Bernie Gilula.

Right up until the end of his illness, when he was in pain and knew his prognosis, he was still offering sage advice, disputing the reviewers' critiques of his last paper, and worrying about people taking responsibility for leadership in his field. He could have been worrying about other things, and he did. He also worried about science, and not just about the hardware of science (techniques, experiments, and results), but about the way that we conduct ourselves as scientists. He believed that each of us has a responsibility to be a scholar, mentor, and leader. He and I talked about this often. There are lessons for all of us.

As a scholar, he believed that we should try to think beyond the boundaries of our own little areas of expertise and interest. We should think about, and appreciate, the broad swathe of science that encompasses not only different areas of biology, but also chemistry, physics, and medicine. He successfully implemented ways to naturally blend these different areas, particularly biology and chemistry, in his own institution and in his science.

He also believed that respect for colleagues and their science was an essential part of scholarship. Scholarship showed in the way that you were knowledgeably critical about your own science and that of your colleagues, in the way that you presented a seminar, or wrote a critique, or talked with a colleague. Science is an honorable profession, and he felt strongly that we had a responsibility to act appropriately as scholars.

As a mentor, he helped me to be less selfish and become more of a community scientist, to be more fair and impartial with colleagues, to be more responsible in the way that I conducted myself as a scientist, and to be more helpful, even altruistic, in promoting the science of others. He was not soft in his approach to mentoring. He did it critically. If you behaved inappropriately, or were doing something scientifically wrong or mundane, he would tell you so straight. It was a shock, because so few have the maturity and confidence to do this for the right reasons. Then, he would offer candid suggestions about what to do, and keep an eye on you afterwards. At his own institu-

tion, students had enormous respect for him because of his way of mentoring—here was someone who truly cared about their future. He saw each person as part of the science community, and that mentoring was critical to help each individual rise to a high standard and, thereby, make the whole community stronger.

As a leader, he was at the front and in the trenches. He had a real passion for science. He had imaginative approaches to problems, and exciting and novel conclusions and hypotheses. He was always looking to advance the field. But to me, what set him apart from others was that he was a leader for his field. He felt a deep responsibility to promote his field, to make it scientifically interesting and attractive to new scientists, and to defend it vigorously in the face of unfair criticism. At the end, this was one of his righteous causes.

We'll miss his scholarship, mentoring, and leadership. Hit 'em straight, my friend.

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