The rewards of science extend far beyond publication

Good research and wise mentorship should be valued more highly than a name added to a paper.

Sir — Peter A. Lawrence, in his Commentary article "Rank injustice" (*Nature* **415,** 835–836; 2002), describes ways in which senior scientists routinely abuse and exploit their juniors. My own experience is very different.

When I was a graduate student and postdoc, my mentors spent countless hours discussing science, experiments and data with me. When they gave seminars, my mentors advertised my work and acknowledged my contributions with every slide. As a result of all their guidance, I have been fortunate enough to have obtained my own lab, to have thrived in it, and to now have the great honour and pleasure of training young scientists myself. In short, good mentors spend time training their students, credit them fairly for their work, and guide them to independence; bad mentors do not.

Young scientists would be well advised to seek out good mentors. Our training system may not be perfect, but when I look around my department and university, I see that quality mentorship is unfailingly taken as seriously as is doing good science. For Lawrence to claim that mentors are routinely abusing young scientists is as irresponsible as it is cynical. More than obtaining fair "allocation of credit", the reward of doing good science includes learning about nature, helping other people and solving mysteries.

How do I rate other scientists? I don't count their *Nature* papers but rather how many of their students do well in their own labs. Now that's success!

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The perils of putting career before all else

Sir — I congratulate you for the stimulating Commentary article about bad mentorship by Peter A. Lawrence (*Nature* **415,** 835–836; 2002). While I am a bit pessimistic about addressing this issue solely from the perspective of the mentors, I can suggest a remedy that can help improve the situation almost immediately: students and fellows must evaluate the mentorship potential of labs they are looking at with an eye towards more than the relative 'fame' of that lab.

It is appropriate to consider the manner in which trainees are mentored in a variety of ways before joining a lab. If this decision is taken solely on career considerations and not scholarship, will it be a surprise to find that the lab, and the mentor, are dominated by blatant careerism?

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A quizzical view pays clear dividends

Sir — It is always a pleasure to read one of Peter Lawrence's polemics[1]. On this occasion he is, of course, correct. Honorary authorship is a bad thing, especially for younger scientists — that is, younger than Lawrence. I am now making a habit of publicly quizzing authors whose position is clearly an honorary one, about some abstruse technical detail of 'their' papers. This is a course of action I recommend.

I cannot, however, avoid admitting that I too have, on occasion, been an author of a paper on which my position as such was wholly unwarranted. One of the most embarrassing examples is a paper — albeit of little note — in which I was invited to be a co-author by one so dear to me that I could not refuse[2]. I cite it here, because I do not believe many others have.

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1. Lawrence, P. A. *Nature* **415,** 835–836 (2002).
2. Lawrence, P. A., Ashburner, M. & Johnston, P. *Genetics* **134,** 1145–1148 (1993).

Film industry shows how to give credit where due

Sir — Few would dispute that the authorship system we have today is open to abuse and probably is frequently abused, as described by Peter Lawrence in his Commentary article (*Nature* **415,** 835–836; 2002). Nevertheless, a long, successful stint in research laboratories is required before anyone gets to be a principal investigator (PI), during which time the researcher has built up a corpus of knowledge and experience that benefits the younger scientists who come to work under his or her supervision.

Even if the PI is not the "discoverer" in a given instance, it is the PI who has created the circumstances in which the discovery was made. The PI deserves credit for qualifying herself or himself to head a laboratory, selecting the problem, getting the funding, recruiting younger colleagues and contributing to the work in various direct and indirect ways.

Rather than taking tennis rankings as a model to avoid, why not take a leaf out of the film industry's book? After every film, the credits not only name contributors but also say what they did (director, script-writer and so on). A scientific paper could list which co-authors carried out the critical experiments, which did the critical analyses and which 'just' arranged the funding.

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Dr Bywater's proposal has been *Nature*'s policy since 1999, as outlined in two Opinion articles (*Nature* 415, 819; 2002 and *Nature* 399, 393; 1999). *Nature* encourages co-authors to specify the contribution they made to the paper in the acknowledgements section.

These letters are a small selection of the many that *Nature* and Dr Lawrence have received about his Commentary. The overwhelming majority were in support of his views. — Editor, Correspondence.

Arab science is not stifled by censorship

Sir — Including my photograph in the box "Science veiled in secrecy" on page 122 of your News Feature on Arab science — "Blooms in the desert" (*Nature* **416,** 120–122; 2002) — might suggest to your readers that I support the views expressed in the article, about censorship and secrecy in Arab countries.

In fact, I emphatically do not share any of these views. Given the level of cooperation between our organization and all leading Arab science and technology institutions, I do not wish in any way to be associated with statements such as those made in this box.

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