



**INTO FOCUS**

**HOW TO GET A REPUTATION IN PALEONTOLOGY II:  
A BETTER TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM**

In my last editorial (Lipps 2002), I suggested a 12-step (actually 13) program on how to get a reputation in paleontology. Those recommendations brought much jocosity, many comments and more than a few stories of how others themselves had been on the receiving end of one or more of those 13 steps. They sent me personal emails telling me their tales, but no one sent them to the **Palaeontologica Electronica** discussion section. Of course not, for the paleontologists who had made their reputations in that way are still alive, still active and still in positions of influence. So I won't divulge what my emailers wrote, but many were quite funny even when bit-terly written. Some of those stories went back decades! I think I can safely say that the writers will never forget the transgressions against them, and the reputations (as in my previous editorial) of the perpetrators remain secure.

So now I would like to suggest a better 12-step program to get a reputation in paleontology.

For many of us, these observations are too late; we already have a reputation for better or for worse. Maybe you won't want to read on, but for teachers and for those who are newly entering the field—students, postdocs, and amateurs, I hope

you will find these observations and suggestions, although not comprehensive, to be useful, enlightening or at least a reminder.

1. Write great papers. Be creative—think of really new ideas and test them properly. Be thorough. Write well. Do not obfuscate! Clarity over big words is always best. Make your point right away so no one has to work to see what you are saying. Be current. Cite the latest stuff, as well as the original material, no matter how old it is. Use Georef, Biosis and other bibliographic search engines to make sure you have the relevant literature on the topic. Remember, if you miss someone's paper that really should be cited, they will remember you a long time. Better to find those—all authors love to see themselves cited, especially when their papers are important to yours. Your reputation will grow, if you say nice things about them.

2. Publish in great places that matter. Will prominent paleontologists read your papers? It will do you little good to publish in the **Journal of Material Sciences**. Choose **Palaeontologica Electronica**, **Paleobiology**,

**Palaeontology, Journal of Paleontology**, and similar well-known journals.

3. Great illustrations count. Sharp images, and clear, bold diagrams. "A picture is worth a thousand words and a good or bad reputation" (I added the last phrase). If you publish in color, as you can in **Palaeontologica Electronica**, be kind to the "color handi-capped" readers (see end note).

4. Give great and enjoyable talks. Have fun, and your stage fright may diminish. Most importantly, have really nice slides, and now with computers and digital cameras you can really impress everyone. Slides are to help the audience. If they also help you give the talk, so much the better. Many of the people who are critical to your reputation can't see very well anymore or, like many paleontologists, are color blind. Some can't hear well, either. Keep these folks in mind—they mean a lot to your reputation. Use BIG and few words on your slides. Use color carefully (endnote again). Over 50% of your audience will really think you are good, if they can just see your slides. Use the microphone. Speak well. Don't read. Practice!

5. Let your buddies in paleontology read or hear about your work before you send it in. They'll think you're neat and they might help you too.

6. Be sure to thank everyone who helped. That one person you thank, whether it is your major professor or the collector who merely tossed a fossil into your collecting bag, will remember when you do, that you are a swell person and a good paleontologist. Thanks are of little effort and the payoff is high!

7. Build trust. Don't do any of those things I mentioned in my last editorial! You really don't want that kind of reputation, and I gather that there are quite enough of those folks around anyway. And not just among paleontologists.

8. Be nice. Be kind. Speak well of other paleontologists. You never know how your comments may be relayed to the next paleontologist.

9. Be humble, but interesting. Everyone is an expert on something in our field, and we don't like self-important paleontologists telling us how good they are. Just have fun discussing your work and opinions.

10. Smile a lot. Everybody loves a smile. Everybody feels good with a genuine smile. It won't hurt either.

11. Keep your sense of humor polished. People like that. Because we have so much in paleontology to be joyful about, we don't need sour-pusses.

12. And, above all, have fun. When you have fun, everyone around you will too. The excitement of the dig, the thrill of discovery, the pleasure in excellent research, and the pride in doing a good paper or talk all make for enormous fun and happiness.

There you have it. Nothing special here and you should have heard it many times before in one context or another. But with paleontologists out there who practice "How to get a reputation in paleontology Part I", perhaps you will forgive me for reminding you again of these steps.

A special note about color: Many of us are color blind, or more properly "color deficient" (What Is Colorblindness and the Different Types? [Waggoner 2003]). About 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women have this condition, and 99% of those are red and/or green "weak". This condition makes cer-

tain color images a trial for these people, and even our best websites and journals miss this (see *Breaking the Color Barrier* [Holden 2002]). In paleontology, color deficiencies seem to run higher than that, perhaps because as students these people migrate to topics where color is not critical. Imagine a color-deficient petrologist or cytologist! Two factors are important—the color of the object and the color of the background. Hues of red and green on blue or yellow may mean that 10% of the people you want to impress, can't be but instead will be frustrated—and there goes a chunk of your reputation right down the tubes. Make your colors bold and saturated (Color Vision, Color Deficiency [Wilson 1996]), and never use colors (especially reds and greens) as keys to your slides; patterns are better. If you must use colors, as in some illustrations, try converting the reds to magenta (see *Color Blind-Friendly Presentation* (Okabe and Ito 2002) for this and other suggestions). Thus, overall a significant part of your audience will like you a whole lot when

you show slides that have colors that they can see (you can test this now on-line at sites like Vischeck that will show you what an image looks like to a color deficient person). A little work will go a long way in making your reputation secure in everyone's mind!

## REFERENCES

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