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Someone shows the way

When young scientists take on research projects, they often have to lead. How to achieve this task with excellence.

By Miriam Lenz

Young scientists have completed many tasks, have achieved their bachelor's and master's degrees, worked for semesters abroad, written their doctoral theses and when they then take the next career step and become junior professors or research group leaders, they suddenly face the question: How do you actually lead a team and become a good boss? The new job suddenly requires not only scientific know-how, but also leadership skills.

"In the last 15 years, expectations of academic leaders have changed considerably," says Svenja Neupert. As a coach, she has been advising and accompanying scientists on their career path for almost 30 years. Today, a professorship is associated with considerably more entrepreneurial demands than in the past, for example with the acquisition of research funds. Neupert therefore advises young scientists to deal with the basics of entrepreneurial thinking at an early stage and not to be afraid of millions. "As a researcher, it is only through entrepreneurial thinking that one can make one's scientific work possible today."

This also applies to work and time management. It makes sense for junior managers in science to set up their own work system and, in a kind of modular system, to create guidelines on how students should be supervised in the research group or chair. Employees would then be able to fall back on such guidelines and would not have to ask managers in each individual case. This relieves all those involved. "Delegating tasks sensibly is essential for good leadership in research," says Svenja Neupert.

Svenja Neupert also recommends that instead of old management methods, where the manager decides everything, new paths should be taken, especially in research. "Scientists are very freedom-loving and individualistic. That's why it is sometimes better that there is no central leadership in research." Instead, she advocates leadership based on other models, for example, the principle of "migratory bird leadership", in which rotating, joint leadership tasks are assumed and the basis of cooperation is a shared vision and common goals - the common research interest.

