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Good mentors and role models

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To me there cannot be a more noble profession than being a scientist. Each day is a challenge bringing with it inevitably something new and novel. In my student years I looked forward to my day in the laboratory, the challenge of the experiment, the day that brought with it both disappointment and the joy of success. Today, as a teacher and researcher, I look forward to my day with my students. They are my inspiration and bring immense joy to my life. Watching them grow and mature as scientists is in itself a reward for me.

My father has had a great influence in my life. He instilled the value of hard work, strive for excellence, and the importance of integrity and honesty. He believed that education was essential for women, and that it would prove to be more valuable than inherited wealth. He encouraged me to study science much against the wishes of the elders in the family who were very keen to get me married immediately after graduation. My parents' support helped me complete the master's degree in Chemistry. I joined for research at the Indian Institute of Science, where I met my husband Dr. B. Ravindranath who is also a scientist. I have been fortunate; my husband has been my best friend and mentor and

provided me immense support all through. Any success that is attributed to me is because of his support and encouragement. He has always advised me to stand up for what I believed in and not to ever compromise on the fundamental principles of my life. I have followed this advice and his support has provided me the strength to do so. I have also been fortunate to have had good mentors, who have been my role models. My Ph.D supervisor, Dr. Raghavendra Rao (at CFTRI, Mysore) and Dr. Michael Boyd, my mentor during the post-doctoral fellowship at NIH, USA have always supported and encouraged me. After my return from USA, the initial years of my independent scientific career as an associate professor at NIMHANS were very difficult. It was very hard to get funding for research and I also felt very isolated. It was at this time that Dr. Boyd helped me tremendously. We collaborated and wrote grant proposals and he provided support both intellectually and in terms of resource that not only ensured that research went well but also critically provided me the platform for interaction with my peers internationally. The journey has never been easy, nor is it easier now. I had to be separated from my family during the post-doctoral years. Now again, when I took up the task to establish NBRC, I have been away from my family and have been commuting between Delhi and Bangalore for nearly a decade. It is only the support system and the network of friends, family and mentors who have provided me the strength to overcome and march on. As I often tell my students, one has to become like a rubber ball; the harder you hit it – the higher it bounces.

At a time when the enrollment in science is low and there is a dire need for teachers and researchers in academia, it is to our benefit to make the workplace gender friendly by including more women in decision-making processes. Although there may be an equal numbers of men and women enrolled in science, the number of women who make it to higher positions dramatically falls. Even if we take into account the drop-out rate of women from the work force due to personal reasons, *the glass ceiling* makes it very difficult for women to move into higher positions.

One of the most critical things that are necessary for building a successful science career is having a support system and

mentorship. While both these are necessary probably throughout our professional life, it is most significant when we start out our research career. Women scientists particularly need help and support to tide over the early period of marriage and child rearing when they are struggling to balance their early career with a growing family. As a minority in the work environment and between managing two jobs - (home and the work place) - women scientists lack the time required to network with peers and build a support system, where one can share both triumphs and disappointments, (the latter constituting a big part of a scientist's life!) It is important that women scientists develop a support system, and this can happen only if women scientists network together and support and help each other. The other important aspect is mentorship. I have benefited tremendously from this and my mentors have supported me and helped me through most of my research career over the last fifteen years, and I look forward to helping create a new generation of empowered scientists, who will be known as scientists who happen to be women, but not women scientists.