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Careers in Technology Transfer

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Maher has been working in technology transfer for 8 years. He started as a Technology Associate within the Life Sciences team at Cambridge Enterprise in May 2005.

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How did you get into technology transfer?

I trained as an intellectual property and insurance lawyer, and moved into technology transfer as a Technology Associate within the Life Sciences team at Cambridge Enterprise (CE) in May 2005. I left the profession for a few years to obtain experience in management consulting before returning to technology transfer in Australia in a predominantly licensing role that focuses on diagnostics and targeted therapies.

How has your career progressed from that point to where you are today?

After internships at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (Brisbane, Australia) and at Imperial Innovations, Imperial College London, I spent 6 years at Cambridge Enterprise.

Since then I worked at McKinsey & Co., a management consulting firm, for over two years. I spent a lot of time focusing on market analytics and business problem solving, before returning to technology transfer in Australia..

What training have you had which has been particularly useful?

The PraxisUnico Fundamentals of Technology Transfer and Advanced Licensing courses are essential to be able to handle a full licensing negotiation without significant oversight. Without the introduction to the concepts they detail, it is quite easy to misinterpret or get lost in discussions with licensees.

In addition, I completed a professional doctorate in biotechnology that examined business plan writing, marketing and the financial aspects of early stage companies. Most of the training I've had has been on the job though, as nothing can teach you like first-hand experience!

What does your day-to-day role involve?

Since returning to technology transfer I have noticed that industry has higher expectations of Universities regarding the commercial case to support our technologies. We are no longer just filing patents and marketing good science, rather we are now expected to define the product proposition, perform cost/benefit analysis and define the customer segments for our technologies. I've built market sizing models that have included primary research such as cold-calling pathology labs to obtain testing and patient response rates.

The bar is also higher to pique industry interest as major companies are bombarded with thousands of unsolicited partnering opportunities every year. I assist my researchers with their presentations to identify issues and data that they need to address in their pitches.

Which achievements would you describe as career highlights?

A lot of attention is paid to invention disclosure and deal rates when technology transfer is really about taking products and services to market. Hence, my highlights are any time I've contributed to a technology that a customer or patient has subsequently found to be beneficial. It's good to know you have helped take a technology from a graph or sketch on an invention disclosure to a product that can be bought.