

# 10 Ways to Annoy Your Labmates...

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## ...and how to resolve the friction

Happy New Year, everyone! All of us at Labguru hope you had a wonderful holiday season, and are ready for successful and prosperous research experiments in 2012. With every new year, of course, comes New Year's resolutions—things we hope to do differently than we did in the past or perhaps some new positive additions to our routines. Nowhere is this more applicable for researchers than the place they spend the majority of their time: The lab.

Laboratories (along with their offices and recreational areas) are inherently collaborative environments. We must share them with our lab mates in a cooperative and collegial way to ensure mutual success. Nevertheless, our research projects and lab work are often individual efforts that conflict with this philosophy.

So, without further ado, here are some common laboratory habits to consider putting on your New Year's resolution list:

### 1. Be messy in common areas

While it is up to you whether to keep a fastidious bench for your own research, nothing is more frustrating for fellow labmates than having to clean up your messes in common areas (cold rooms, tissue culture rooms, microscopy and gel areas, etc.) before running their own experiments. Help your colleagues' productivity in 2012 by being respectful, cleaning up after yourself and leaving all equipment as you found it.

### 2. Leave broken equipment for the next person

Equally as annoying as a messy piece of equipment is an unexpectedly broken one. Imagine heading over to the FPLC to purify your highly sensitive protein, only to have a lab mate tell you "Oh, yeah. It doesn't work." If a piece of equipment breaks while you are using it, tell the lab manager, leave a note, email the group and call a service repair technician immediately.

### 3. Hog equipment

When reserving equipment, do NOT reserve unnecessary chunks of time "just to be safe," consider other labmates that might need to perform similar experiments, and most importantly: if you are not going to need equipment that you signed up for, take your name off of the sign-up sheet.

### 4. Don't shower

While complete dedication to one's research is a commendable trait, it need not come at the expense of your lab and office mates' comfort. Maintain good hygiene on a regular basis, particularly if you have taken breaks to go to the gym. Your colleagues will thank you for it.

### 5. Play loud music in common areas

The advent of iPods has largely eliminated arguments over what kind of music to play in common lab areas. But if you are still playing music openly, remember to consider volume and genre before blasting away. Perhaps you and your colleagues can pick a common album that everyone might enjoy!

### 6. "Borrow" non-communal reagents without asking

Do not take private stocks of reagents from labmates, or anything out of their freezers, boxes or benchtops, without asking in person, even if you are in a bind and there is no one around. Nobody wants to be surprised with missing reagents on the day they need to perform an important experiment! This is not just respectful, it's common sense.

### 7. Leave leftovers in the lunchroom fridge

This year, let's keep all our experiments to the labs, shall we? I've seen an impressive array of lunchroom and refrigerator bacterial collections in my day, some requiring biohazard suits to clean up. Respect your colleagues by wrapping all your food in sealed containers, removing soiled food in a timely manner, and not leaving dirty dishes in sinks. Your mother did not



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#### **8. Don't show up to group seminars and presentations**

It's true that seminars, group presentations, and other mandatory meetings aren't always the most exciting, and they take time away from benchwork. However, nothing shows less support for fellow lab mates (and disinterest in their work) than skipping seminars. Take these as opportunities to find out what your colleagues are working on and to learn about new research that might be useful in your own studies. Remember, when it's you who is presenting, you want a full room of **supportive colleagues** – return the favor!

#### **9. Speaking and writing the common laboratory language**

Science is more multicultural than ever. Many labs have researchers from all over the world. However, it is general practice to require a common laboratory language—usually coinciding with whatever country the lab is located in. This is both for practical purposes (so that personnel can communicate and troubleshoot), safety (labeling of chemicals and other hazardous materials) and camaraderie (making lab mates feel included). For the sake of all of the above, as well as your own enrichment, try to utilize the lab language as much as possible.

#### **10. Shout on your cellphone**

This used to be far more of an isolated issue in office areas when landlines were the only phones available in labs. But with cell phones now so ubiquitous, phone disturbance is an issue everywhere—even darkrooms! Remember to respect lab, recreation and office space with your phone etiquette. Control the volume of your voice, and if you think your call will necessitate a long conversation, go to a more private space.

*What do you think? Have we covered most of the common laboratory transgressions? Any other pet peeves you'd care to share with us from your days in the lab? Leave us a comment below!*

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