

Dr. Yukiko Goda Full Transcript

Team Leader (Ph.D.)

Laboratory for Synaptic Plasticity and Connectivity

RIKEN Center for Brain Science

This interview took place on April 22, 2022, in Wako, Japan, at the RIKEN Wako Brain Science Neural Circuit Genetics Research Bldg. Room 102m.

Career summary

1985 University of Toronto, BSc in Biochemistry and Chemistry

1991 Stanford University, PhD in Biochemistry

1991 Postdoctoral Fellow, The Salk Institute

1997 Assistant Professor, Division of Biology, University of California, San Diego

2002 Senior Group Leader, MRC Cell Biology Unit, University College London

2011 Senior Team Leader, RIKEN Brain Science Institute

April 2015 - June 2022 Deputy Director, RIKEN Brain Science Institute (April 2018-)
RIKEN Center for Brain Science

2018 - March 2023 Team Leader, RIKEN Center for Brain Science

2022 - present Professor, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology
Graduate University

Adachi: With regard to the background to this Elsevier Foundation Project, Dr. Yuko Harayama, former Executive Director of RIKEN, who is an Elsevier Foundation board member, was inspired to pursue an initiative that would better support women researchers and young researchers. That is where it all began. Over the course of the project, we will be talking with woman researchers who have extensive experience as PIs (principal investigators) and hearing their advice for young researchers who will be taking charge of their own labs in the future. What is the right mindset when becoming a PI? What kind of lab management and research leadership skills are demanded? Today we'll be hearing about what you yourself have learned in your career. So, this will not be a discussion about science

per se, but about management at the laboratory level.

Dr. Goda, you received your Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1991. At that time, what future did you imagine for yourself as a scientist?

Goda: I was rather naive back then and my image of the future was vague. I had a simplistic view that I wanted to do something interesting. I genuinely wanted to do research. In general, my thinking was mainly, "Research is just doing science." At the same time, I was my academic advisor's first PhD student and had been a member of the lab from its very start, so I was able to experience the "launch" and development of a new lab.

Adachi: And due to that, while you were doing the science part of research, you were also being exposed naturally to how a research lab operates?

Goda: Exactly. And later on in my career that experience proved priceless.

Adachi: Back in those early days, you were focused solely on the research itself...

Goda: That's right. Along with other graduate students around the same age as me who had entered the lab at the same time that I did, we all were bursting with enthusiasm. It was quite a small department, and everyone got along. We and the postdocs all were tight-knit. We would work in the lab together, go out and have fun together, go back and do more research together, and then do it all over again. That "work hard, play hard" team spirit.

Adachi: At what point did you start to think that you might want to run your own lab?

Goda: Well, I had vague ideas about, "I'd like to do this kind of research," and "I'd like to have my own lab." But the motivation for wanting the lab was just to do the kind of research that I really wanted to do. For me it was the research desire that drove the desire for my own lab, not the other way around. So, it was not based on the premise of having my own lab.

Adachi: So, in order to do the research you wanted, you envisioned having a certain kind of lab in which to carry it out?

Goda: Exactly. It was all for the sake of pursuing the science. I knew people who as grad students already were aiming at a lab of their own, but I was more laid-back. Going on to grad school itself, for me, was not something I had been dreaming of doing ever since I was little. So, I was more focused on figuring out what I wanted to do as a postdoc. And it was only after that when I started thinking about having my own lab. It's not true of everybody, but when I was young, I was thinking maybe three or four years ahead at most, not 10 or 20 years ahead. Of course, everyone is different when it comes to that.

Adachi: You spent about six years at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies as a postdoc and then in 1997, you moved to UCSD (University of California San Diego) to take an Assistant Professor job. What prompted you to make the decision? Did you think it was just about the right time for you to do so?

Goda: It was somewhere midway through my postdoc that I started to feel like I wanted a lab of my own. In grad school, I had had to study so many different topics, and the research lab was a whole new world to me. I also had to adapt to a new life. By the time I started as a postdoc, I had already accumulated all kinds of experience and techniques and had started to form a picture of what I wanted to be doing down the road. The realization that I wanted to do my own research with my own research group came about a few years into my postdoc. After that, I spent another couple of years learning on the job and reached the point where I felt that I was about 80% ready. That's when I started applying for faculty positions and started getting ready to make the leap.

Adachi: And an offer came in within the timeframe that you were hoping for?

Goda: When I applied, I had just published papers here and there which demonstrated that I was getting results. So, the timing was good.

Adachi: What changes came about now that you were running your own lab?

Goda: The jump from postdoc to PI felt like the biggest one. When I moved on from grad school to a postdoc, all that was expected of me was to do my research. In grad school, there had been much more of a learning component, but as a postdoc, I was free to be independent and pursue my own ideas.

Adachi: When you made the “jump” to PI, what struck you as the most difficult aspect?

Goda: When I started my own lab, I couldn't go on thinking like a solo researcher, I had to think in terms of a team. Which meant learning all the necessary management skills. Nowadays institutes we belong to offer courses and other resources on that subject, but that wasn't the case in my time. Also, I had to secure grants for my lab. So, the biggest jump was starting to think in terms of my team rather than myself.

Adachi: Could you share any examples of how starting up a lab was really demanding and draining? Times when you struggled?

Goda: Actually, the toughest part about managing a lab for me has always remained the same up to this day: constantly operating in a team context and never losing sight of that on a day-to-day-basis. Of course, keeping tabs on how our projects were progressing is one thing, but given that today's focus is not the science itself, I should probably talk about how I manage a team. There are many other factors, such as fulfilling PI's role within the department or ensuring that any collaborations within and outside our team are not being neglected.

Adachi: What kinds of issues were the most time-consuming to deal with?

Goda: I would say finding solutions when something was going wrong, or when graduate students were making a course correction, or talking things through with lab members who

were struggling in some way. Including when someone joins the team.

Adachi: And what was your approach to those types of situations? Would you consult other professors who had been running labs for a long time?

Goda: Yes, I would go ask senior faculty members for advice. They taught me a lot by sharing their own depth of experience. And each person has their own individual way of doing things, so it was a process of me assembling the tools that matched up with my own style. For example, sometimes conflict would break out in the lab while I was away on business. And when I got back, through resolving things, I would figure out ways to prevent the same kind of thing from happening again.

Adachi: So, you were able to resolve things right away when you got back to the lab?

Goda: What really helped me out was that initially my team was all students. Things are a bit different at RIKEN because it isn't a university, but UCSD is, so grad students and undergrads, and then a lot of the technical staff are also university graduates, meaning that the average age of all the lab members was really young. In those days, one of the postdocs was just a year older than me and acted as the "experienced hand" for my lab. It was a huge benefit to have somebody like that around. Because in those situations, the more life experience one has, the better.

Within the lab, it is kind of like its own world, a microcosm. And there are all these dynamic individuals with different personalities. It's important to respect people's differences while ensuring that the lab work proceeds smoothly. The very first time an issue popped up in my lab, it was a kind of "Oh, no!" moment. But over time, there are always going to be issues cropping up here and there. The longer you are in this job, the more things you will have dealt with. And every PI is going to have their own style of dealing with things, but ultimately, it's vital to come alongside the person having the issue and understand where the problem springs from. You can't just focus on the outcome only.

Adachi: Do you end up spending a relatively large amount of time meeting with people one

on one?

Goda: Ah, well, I do spend quite a lot of time having discussions with all my people. Having a weekly lab meeting is a practice that I continue to this day. And in addition, I have all kinds of conversations with people every day over coffee in our break room.

Adachi: So, you then moved from UCSD to University College London. Not only were you relocating to a new country, I assume you were taking a step up to Senior Group Leader. What changes did that mean for you?

Goda: I was operating in a quite flat organizational structure. The ranks went Assistant Professor, then Associate Professor, and so on. I moved from a junior faculty position to a senior, tenured one when I went to London. The Department Head's org chart was quite flat, so I didn't really need to change my way of doing things. A PI is a PI. So, nothing much changed internally to my lab management, as far as research content or time commitments, but externally I had increased departmental responsibilities and workload. And as a result, I felt I had less and less time, but the change wasn't that big.

And I mentioned the flat org chart, at UCSD for example, the junior faculty had extensive departmental duties. In the first year I was exempted from teaching duties, and classes and other responsibilities only started piling up gradually from the second year on. Other than that, I had to serve on various committees. It didn't feel like a big transition immediately, it happened bit by bit.

Adachi: Your lab had never been very large, is that right?

Goda: That's right. Probably based on my previous experience, I had learned a lot by then. And I knew what fit my management style and what didn't. Also, what fit with my research content. In consideration of those, right around 10 people was ideal. When I looked at bigger labs, it was obvious that actually only a limited subset of researchers were really driving the lab's research forward. Of course, there are always exceptions, but that was the general rule I observed. So, I wanted to put a ceiling on my own lab size where I would be able to

provide sufficient individual supervision to each of my researchers.

When I was a postdoc, my advisor was Professor Chuck Stevens. He told me six or seven people was a good size. At that scale, he didn't even hold lab meetings which was very unusual. Chuck would go around personally and talk to everyone every day, and if they hit on an interesting topic, he would keep the discussion going for a long time.

The good thing about that style of managing a lab is that the PI is personally familiar with everything that's happening. But I felt that a negative was that lab members would only be up to speed on what other lab members were doing if they proactively went and talked to each other on a regular basis. It was an approach that was good for the boss. But definitely an outlier in how labs are usually managed. I came from that background, and in grad school as well when I was a lab member for the first time, it had also been a relatively small lab. Nowadays as places like Janelia Research Campus and HHMI (Howard Hughes Medical Institute) are promoting small, compact labs, I too think that is better from a cost-performance perspective. And that is a good fit for my style.

Adachi: As you were building your own management style, did you ever try changing things up, such as expanding your lab size to see how it would work out?

Goda: There were times when I had a sudden spike in the number of students in the lab. And it led to competing for space, sparking of conflicts, and just generally everyone being more irritable. People couldn't use the equipment when they wanted to, annoyances like that. Twelve or 13 people is the largest that it ever got. And that just confirmed in my mind that right around 10 is ideal. So, I never did try to scale up the lab significantly.

It depends on the staff composition also. Because my lab has a lot of postdocs, a high ratio relative to grad students, we ended up keeping it at this scale as a result.

Adachi: You mentioned that at UCSD you had one senior postdoc who was able to serve as your right-hand man. Did you also have someone like that at the other stops in your career?

Goda: Actually, no, I wouldn't say he was my right-hand man. It wasn't like he had or wanted an official role of authority. What was really special about him was just that he would

step in naturally and help out whenever needed. I run my lab as a very flat organization. I try to eliminate hierarchy so that graduate students and even undergrads can freely speak up with their opinions and give input.

I feel like I have been very fortunate to get excellent people in my lab over the years.

Adachi: So, you pushed ahead in your career with this style of taking time to maintain good one-on-one communications with everyone in your labs and keeping a flat hierarchy.

Goda: Exactly.

Adachi: What brought about your decision to move from the UK to RIKEN in Japan in 2011?

Goda: Personal factors were very significant in that decision. It became inconvenient for me to be living outside Japan at that time, in terms of my family situation.

Adachi: And when you came to RIKEN, did you have a picture of how you wanted to set up your lab?

Goda: No, I just wanted to keep doing it the way I had been doing it! (laughter) When you move to a different country, you are faced with a different culture. I was advised that it would be the same when I went from the US to the UK. There were all kinds of differences in how the grant process works, for example. And then the UK is famous for its teatime tradition, twice a day at 11 and 3. Although in the US the “coffee hour” also exists as something similar.

At teatime, everyone gathers and sits around talking about whatever. Going out to the pub together is another big element of UK culture. And these traditions lead to people being in constant discussion and debate. Those discussions are often what spawn experiments. In the US, though, it is a more common research style for people to jump in and try anything they think of without feeling the need to talk it over.

In the UK, the number of people in each lab tends to be smaller, or it was that way in my

time there. Now the style and direction of research are changing dramatically, actually. So the way I did things may not be too relevant to researchers coming up now.

On that note, I was a bit worried if everything would work out after coming back to Japan. But RIKEN takes an especially international approach and English is used as official language alongside Japanese. That was very appealing to me.

Adachi: Coming to RIKEN, and implementing your existing lab management style, were you able to get off to a good start without having any special difficulties?

Goda: Well (laughing), maybe on the admin side. Japanese university systems, you know. I had been overseas since the first semester of high school. And I had often lived outside Japan even in the years before that. So, I wasn't familiar with Japanese-style systems, and the admin website was all in Japanese. That was a bit of a pain. So yes, I had some difficulty in dealing with the management side, but not with the research side.

Adachi: In terms of moving research forward with your team, there were no difficulties?

Goda: No, that kept going as before.

Adachi: So, in July, you are moving to OIST (Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University). What prompted that?

Goda: They made me an offer. Would I move one more time? My whole life, since I was born, I have moved around constantly. I was thinking that I still might have a new phase in my life as a researcher. And OIST seemed like the right opportunity and right timing.

Adachi: At OIST will your lab be about the same number of people?

Goda: Yes.

Adachi: Looking back on your life as a researcher, can you think of any turning points, any

critical moments or crises that in retrospect taught you something very important that helped boost you to becoming a better PI?

Goda: It feels like it was one crisis after another! (laughing) Like with moving my lab. I'm an optimistic person, so I usually just blank out unpleasant memories right away. (laughter) When I moved to RIKEN, I recalled, "Oh yes, this is what it felt like going from San Diego to London! I had forgotten what it's like!" Over and over, I had those flashes of recollection. I suppose the same thing will happen yet again with my move to OIST. This is probably not a great example. When I feel like I'm going through a bad time, a crisis, I don't learn as much as I could because I just put it behind me, but subconsciously, some lessons probably stick with me.

No matter how much you prepare, each institution has its own set of systems that are different from the last one. Even if they happen to use the same system, the people in charge of that system will be different, and that means you have to deal with it differently. It takes a long time to figure out how everything actually runs, that lesson definitely has been drilled into me.

There are definitely benefits to staying in the same place throughout your career. But there are downsides as well as upsides to me. There are always little surprises, wrinkles in the system that you didn't expect. I know I'm being very abstract here...

Adachi: You're speaking about the systems in place at universities or other institutions?

Goda: Yes. For example, "If you want to get this done, the trick is to do that." When it comes to the grant system, or whatever. Of course, they explain it to you, and you understand it to a certain extent, but if you don't understand the words that are being used in their explanation, you won't know what information you should really be listening for. You say to yourself, "OK, sure, I understand." But later on, you realize that you actually didn't understand at the time. It often happens that only after you've learned your lesson through experience does it dawn on you. It is also difficult to understand when you have a language barrier where nuances may not get across.

In that regard, people and systems in the US are the most straightforward, so it's easiest to

understand things. Every culture has its own strengths and weaknesses, of course.

Adachi: Looking back, can you recall instances where you felt you hadn't fully grasped things, and that you struggled with?

Goda: Not knowing who to ask was a big one. And unwritten rules about what you were supposed to do, and not supposed to do. Those types of issues were hard to get a handle on! (laughter)

Adachi: So, you join a new organization, and they give you some documentation like system introduction manuals and so on, they have you attend an orientation. And then it's time for you to actually roll up your sleeves and start doing things. Then what happens...?

Goda: Yes, well I'll give you an example: grant systems. Even after they explained it to me, I couldn't tell how it actually runs until I was inside it. Recently, young researchers have become adept at gathering all kinds of information online. But there is still a lot you need to know that doesn't exist anywhere online. It's a very fine balance to find between making wasted efforts, and not putting in enough effort. There are times when you can't figure out the right balance.

Adachi: At times like those, did you find it useful to get advice from more senior researchers, mentors, as to how they handled the situation?

Goda: Definitely, they were a huge help.

Adachi: In your experience, did you have times when there was nobody you felt you could easily go to with those questions, or you didn't know who to ask?

Goda: I would say that most of the time there were mentors who took me under their wing and were happy to discuss things with me. But sometimes they would assume I already understood more than I actually did...and that could be awkward...

Because I do speak Japanese to some degree, in some cases, unlike how they would communicate with people they know don't speak any Japanese, they spoke to me in a way that I actually couldn't fully follow them.

That kind of miscommunication can happen in any context. And you have to recognize that situation and adjust yourself to the other person. Which applies to a lot of things, but whenever it does happen, it's challenging.

Adachi: So, you incorporated what you experienced into your own lab management style, including how you handle researchers coming into your organization and what you consider the keys to good communication. Is that correct?

Goda: I don't like to overwhelm people with too much proactive advice. I make the assumption that the person will come and ask me when they feel they need it. So, I always maintain an open-door policy. For example, I always encourage people to come and see me if they want to have a meeting or if they have a question.

Back to the topic of research for a moment, there are people who prefer to come and discuss their findings once they have accumulated a certain amount of data. On those occasions, I don't want them to feel pressured. So, the most important thing when someone is struggling is to talk it through and figure out what it is that they don't understand, and to what extent, or what it is that they are having trouble with. A "black box" part is all that matters. That kind of problem is a challenge.

Adachi: What moments do you find the most fun or rewarding when you run your own lab?

Goda: Without a doubt, it's when making discoveries. When someone gets results, I feel so happy and so does the researcher, of course! (laughter) It's the time when we can share a moment of joy.

Adachi: And what occasions do you find the least fun?

Goda: When the data that you get is not the data you expected, I still try to work out what

to do with it. And I take enjoyment in that process of thinking too. I guess I like challenges. (laughing) Honestly, I have to adopt an attitude like that, or I can't deal with it. I'm able to tell myself that I'm having a good time anyway.

Adachi: Aside from the research, on the lab management side of things, in your responsibilities as a PI, what's not so enjoyable about that part?

Goda: Definitely it's those situations where someone is struggling. When you're trying to generate enthusiasm in someone but it's not happening. You've brought together all these people for the purpose of doing research or supporting research. So, normally that purpose keeps everyone motivated. But sometimes, problems may arise for someone in the lab due to their family situation, or personal issues. For people in their 20s, they are often dealing with various kinds of personal drama, it seems, but at the same time, they are adults, not simply undergraduate students anymore. It's a little bit different from working at a regular company job. Because it is an institution that provides education and fosters researchers as well as being a workplace. I guess companies do training of their employees too, but a research lab is literally an educational institution where students are trained. That is why the toughest thing for me to deal with is when someone in the lab is suffering and in distress.

Adachi: Have you ever dealt with a case like that where you just couldn't resolve it?

Goda: It does happen. With the end result being that I say to the person, "Is research really the path you want to be on? Are you cut out for this career, or should you go in a different direction?" I've dealt with a number of instances of that.

Adachi: And how did you approach those types of difficult conversations?

Goda: Anywhere you go, there are going to be cases like that. At UCSD it happened with a very talented young student doing an MD/Ph.D. course. That person said to me, when I was a member of his master's committee, that he wanted to quit. But after saying he was quitting, he had a change of heart, so in order to give him another chance, I had the person

transfer to my lab.

And he really wanted to overcome things, and I wanted to support him in every way possible and did all I could, but in the end, it didn't work out. It was obvious that he was very talented and had a great future in front of him, that quitting would be a shame. Hmmm...I was thinking about what I could do.... But ultimately, I went along with his wishes.

The same in London. It generally happens with students rather than postdocs. Like at UCSD, I was on the thesis review committee. In that case the student was in another lab, not in mine. The student expressed a wish to take a different career path. It's the hardest when a grad student quits the program. There are cases where postdocs go into industry even though both they and the PI had been aiming for an academic position. Generally, that is a mature decision made by an adult who is responsible for their own life and career.

But the younger ones, they suffer more. And it is tough for me also, having to deal with them. Even at RIKEN, there was a very promising student who encountered difficulties and ended up taking a job at a company. That process was pretty painful.

Adachi: How did you yourself keep going in those challenging circumstances?

Goda: It's important to talk it out with the person who is struggling. And then sometimes, you have to be careful not to let it become an issue that sweeps up other people in the lab. When you have happy people, it makes other people around them happier. Happiness is contagious. And the opposite applies as well. Someone who is really down can bring down everyone else's mood.

Adachi: During your career in research, who was the biggest influence on you? Who gave you the best advice on managing a lab?

Goda: Probably the conversations that I had with the professor who supervised my Ph.D. and my advisor when I was a postdoc. They were easy to talk to, and they understood me really well. And during my time in Japan, there were scientists in the same field as me whom I could talk to. Since they really understood the field of research, and we were familiar with each other's research, and also had known each other for a long time.

Adachi: Would you say that the management style you formulated was influenced by theirs?

Goda: Absolutely.

Adachi: When I looked at the website showing the members of your lab, I noticed a great deal of diversity both in terms of gender and nationality. Are their particular management approaches you focus on with diverse staff members?

Goda: I don't intentionally manage them differently. I think not focusing on that makes things easier. Because if you do focus on it, it can cause difficulties. For example, it could split the staff in two. I think it is rather difficult to have a team that is not very diverse, because in such cases the contrast (of differences) can be quite strong. I didn't mean to intentionally gather diverse members. In London, particularly, we had an extremely diverse set of people. There was one time when the final eight remaining teams in the World Cup were almost all represented on our staff! You can imagine the excitement! (laughter) That was a memorable moment. So, I think that diversity is a very positive thing for the makeup of lab members.

Adachi: When recruiting staff, and advertising positions available in the lab, do you receive interest from all over the globe?

Goda: Yes. We do get inquiries sometimes. But one thing that has changed more recently, compared to how it used to be, is that everyone is constantly checking recruiting ads online.

Adachi: That's how it was when you were a postdoc and a graduate student, at those respective labs?

Goda: In the lab where I was a postdoc we had people from Mexico, China, and the US. In the US, the labs had a high percentage of Americans, generally. Whereas in Europe, labs tended to be a much more mixed group of nationalities. The most diversity I experienced

was in London. That was before Brexit, when the UK was still in the EU, so it was open to students and postdocs from across Europe. This was just after 9/11 in the US, and a lot of people who would have gone from Europe to the US to take postdocs had second thoughts and became more inclined to stay in Europe. In fact, Americans became relatively rare in the UK around that time. I think things have changed a bit now, but since I returned to Japan, I have been hiring without consciously thinking about diversity.

Adachi: So, your lab ending up having a more diverse staff just arose naturally from hiring for the type of research you do and your field of specialization?

Goda: Yes, but at the same time, if we are talking about graduate students in particular, it's crucial that they are young and that they master English, or they will be at a disadvantage. Here we have postdocs who speak outstanding Japanese and having them is a big plus for communication around the lab.

Globalization, that term is thrown around all the time, but to some degree I depend on my staff to make it work. Just this morning we had a lab meeting, and a grad student was presenting who is still in the process of mastering English. But everyone in the lab helps each other in aspects of communication in such instances.

Adachi: Do you play a part in setting the stage for this mutual assistance, in terms of how you run the meetings and so forth?

Goda: I often interject! (laughing) I try not to do it TOO often.

Adachi: Do you have someone else who can act as a facilitator in meetings?

Goda: Not really. I want everyone to contribute and speak up without hesitation.

Adachi: Would you say that you have a clearly defined vision of lab management? An ideal that you intend to keep pursuing?

Goda: To sum it up in one word, maybe “fairness”? That may not be the right term. “Transparency”? I want everyone to participate. People have different personality types, some are shy, some are aggressive, and I mean aggressive in a positive sense. It’s about how to make sure that everyone is able to have their say, even people who are shy, without being overlooked or left out. Making that happen is something I always have to be conscious of.

Adachi: So, you have been striving to make fairness and transparency the hallmarks of your lab. Were there times when you found it difficult to do that, to give everyone a fair chance to contribute?

Goda: When it comes time to write reviews, I work with my postdocs to write them, and make sure that everyone has a turn and gets a chance to write reviews. Fairness applies to authorship, based on the degree of contribution made to the research work. Everyone’s contribution needs to be clearly acknowledged.

Adachi: And in order for everyone to be satisfied that it is fair, there has to be communication about that, an exchange of opinions.

Goda: Exactly. That is a must. From the earliest stage possible, that communication needs to be happening.

Adachi: What have you found to be the hardest part of continuing along in your career as a PI?

Goda: Maintaining the right balance of responsibilities. A PI has a variety of duties to perform and being able to rotate between them with the right amount of attention with good time management is quite difficult, in fact. I will be working on something and suddenly find that it’s late at night. It’s important to get work done efficiently on a daily basis to prevent having to burn the midnight oil.

Adachi: Did you develop time management skills through a process of trial and error?

Goda: I'll give you an example of a time management measure that I came across recently. There was a person who sent out a notification that said, "It may take me some time to reply to emails, because I will only be checking email twice per day." That sounds like a good idea to me! (laughter) Because, say an email comes in and you see it and say, "Oh, I need to handle this right now," then I'll put off the thing I had been working on before seeing that email. If I let that happen too often, it will disrupt my priorities. I don't think that's good. But there are times when I can deal with something immediately, and other situations when I can't. I think that's something everyone faces. But I try to avoid letting a backlog develop.

Adachi: How do you find the right balance between your personal and professional lives?

Goda: I think on that point, I am a very poor role model! (laughing) A role model of what NOT to do. I work long hours and tend to have no boundaries!

Adachi: Do you have any experiences where you wish you had done something differently in retrospect?

Goda: Oh, plenty. But I try not to get bogged down in what-ifs and if-onlys, and focus instead on learning lessons for what I would do next time. If you start to think in terms of, "If only I had done this, then it would have turned out like that" hypotheticals, there's no end to it. I tell myself what's done is done and focus on moving forward.

Adachi: If you could give just one piece of advice to someone taking their first PI position, what would it be?

Goda: Well. The most important thing for a lab is people who make up the team. Of course, your own personal ideas and research goals are also important. But people are the ones who make it possible for you to reach those goals. People are absolutely the critical factor.

Selecting the right people is crucial, and people define the environment in which your research is going to play out. Of course, funding is important, but so is getting results, research success. All of that, as I mentioned at the diversity seminar, ties into your people. If you don't have the right people, you won't get the results. If you don't have the results, you won't get further research funding. And if you don't get research funding, you can't hire the people you need.

So, all three factors are vital. But when you start with a new team, I think that most of the time, the pieces already in place include a well-settled research environment in which to do your research, a start-up funding, and so on. And then the very first thing you do is bring in the right people.

Adachi: When hiring, do you take into account factors besides research prowess? For example, personality, temperament. Is there any quality in a team member that you insist on and would never compromise?

Goda: Well, every individual is different. Personality types vary widely. It's very important to talk to the people who wrote the letters of recommendation.

Adachi: Do you approach them informally?

Goda: Yes, I ask them whether they have sensed something wrong with the candidate. The most important factor is their research results, but in addition to that, there is compatibility. I evaluate that when I interview them in person. But in recent years due to COVID those had to be conducted over Zoom, and there are a lot of things that it is hard to get a good handle on in a Zoom meeting. On the other hand, if it's in person, nowadays we have to be wearing masks, which means we can't see each other's faces. Doing both a Zoom and an in-person interview is probably ideal, but that's difficult to achieve.

And then there is an element that you can't be completely sure of until that person actually comes and works for you. But I think it is by and large a mutual effect. Other than matters related to research, if that person isn't happy, other people won't be happy working with them. Influence tends to go both ways like that. It's important to bear that in mind and

consider whether the candidate is likely to get along in the lab environment.

Adachi: In interviews, do you have any questions that you always ask that are not research related?

Goda: There are a lot of different styles for writing your CV, and that reveals something of the candidate's personality. In my case, I look at what they have written about their interests, at how they present themselves to others. I ask myself, "What is this person hoping to get out of this job?" And I feel looking at those aspects really helps me to answer that question. I always ask them to write down the reason that they want to be part of my lab.

Adachi: What is your picture of the ideal PI, and do you feel there is any area where you fall short of that?

Goda: Oh, I fall short in so many ways! Despite that, though, I have to be who I am. I cannot be a different person. So, I just try to find ways to keep growing into a person who does all I can do within the realm of what's possible for me.

Adachi: I'm surprised to hear you say that about yourself, that you feel you fall short in many ways, considering how well you have done as a PI, as it seems to me from what you have said in this interview.

Goda: It's quite common for there to be some divergence between what I want to do and what the people in my lab want to do, and we need to get our thoughts together. And my lab engages in a lot of collaborative research, which is very interesting stuff, but it involves the work of both my team and another team. I not only have to work alongside that PI effectively, but also the people on their team. In that context, I want to talk with everyone in order to identify how to propel the work forward in a successful and exciting way. I manage to make the collaboration work, but things always seem to crawl along slowly rather than dash ahead as I would hope. Maybe I'm just impatient. I want to be able to push the pace more quickly without hesitation! (laughing)

Matsuo: It occurred to me that a distinctive characteristic of your style was that you find it easier to manage your lab when it's diverse. Where did that mindset come from originally? Is it due to your upbringing? Or your experiences, something you arrived at by working at several different labs and with different groups of staff?

Goda: My upbringing is one factor, and I have experienced a great deal of diversity in different labs I've been part of. But how can I put this? I don't like it when people are polarized. Just look at the wars going on in the world right now. For example, what's curious about being in Japan is that the word "globalization" is used so much, but it is used in such a way as to emphasize this contrast between foreigners and Japanese. And for me, having wandered around here and there all over the world as a very "globalized" person, I find that usage problematic. There is this push to globalize, but it takes the form of dividing people up along the lines of: I'm Japanese and you're foreign. And I wouldn't necessarily describe that as producing "diversity." The benefits to research come from assembling talent from many countries.

And the same applies to focusing on the ratio of women to men. I'm always conscious of it because I'm a woman. But sometimes my lab will have almost all men working in it, and other times there will be a lot of women in the team. It just depends. I don't think there's any point in excessively focusing on those fluctuations. But diversity does come in to play in the sense that if you have only two women and all the rest are men, it can be a difficult environment for them. So, a more balanced ratio of women to men is good. In terms of globalization, if half of the staff are Japanese speakers and the other half can't speak Japanese, it becomes problematic. For example, we have a French person who can speak both English and Japanese. We have someone who is British and can't speak much Japanese, but whose child is in (Japanese) preschool, or we have someone whose wife is Japanese. And then we have Japanese staff members who are very serious about wanting to improve their English. And how to make the lab run smoothly with that kind of mix of people, understanding what each individual's challenge is, that's what I consider diversity.

If you have never worked in a diverse environment, then you won't understand the things that seem challenging to people who are different from you. And although it's not being

talked about much yet in Japan, in other countries, the diversity issue has gone far beyond the female/male ratio issue. We experienced that for the first time in our lab. It was somewhat difficult to get a visa for the person's partner. That's a restriction coming from national policy in Japan and there's nothing we can do about it at our level. Which reminds me, that actually may be the toughest thing I have had to deal with. How far behind Japan is still on those issues.

Matsuo: In terms of research results, though, diversity is important?

Goda: Well, in the sense that communication in the lab directly affects research success, and everyone needs to be part of discussions about troubleshooting. Diversity reduces the incidence of various difficulties by making it possible for people to exchange information and possible solutions freely and not have to feel isolated when they run into a problem.

Matsuo: You said that over your 20 years as a PI, your approach to lab management hasn't changed. According to what you've shared, it certainly seems that way. Having said that, has anything changed or deepened and improved over the course of 20 years? Have you become unable to do something, or forced to give up something?

Goda: If I've given up anything or lost anything, I would say it is time. Setting that aside, by sticking with one approach and going deep with it, I have built up my own deep and wide database of experiences from which I can instantly draw on to deal with various things that come up.

Adachi: One last question, looking back on your career as a researcher, you said the biggest jump was becoming a PI for the first time, didn't you?

Goda: That's right.

Adachi: Going from postdoc to PI, did you start to have a different perspective on the scientist's landscape?

Goda: It was a sudden increase in responsibility, and I had to take on management duties, as well as educational ones. I had done some teaching as a postdoc. But that increased sharply when I made the jump to PI. I was often in charge of teaching classes back then.

Adachi: Is there any advice your present self would give to yourself right before you made that jump?

Goda: Understand that you will have to be flexible, ready to adapt. And that there are many people you can go and ask for advice.

Adachi: Thank you for your time, Dr. Goda.

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