



ACS Women Chemists of Color Summit

— John Simpson

With support from the National Science Foundation, the American Chemical Society in late August hosted a Women Chemists of Color Summit in Boston, Mass., at ACS' 240th National Meeting to explore career paths taken by minority women chemists.

The discussions featured panelists from academia, government, and industry. It included a morning symposium on early career issues called Getting to the Table and an afternoon symposium titled Staying at the Table addressing challenges encountered at established careers.

Collectively they asked a simple question: 'What do we do to help young people succeed in their environment?'

- Be discerning, shrewd and don't back down.

"Finding your gift to the world is one of the challenges everyone must have," says Sharon Haynie, a research scientist for the DuPont Co. "Sometimes your own inner voice can get drowned out by others, but don't give in to what you feel is right."

- Find a mentor and a network of people for help.

Remember that someone has been in your shoes before, says Kris Prather, assistant professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Chemical Engineering. "They have found an answer. It's your job to find that person," she said. "In other words, find someone who is doing exactly what it is you want to do. And then find out how she got there."

- Some attain success with a quiet confidence. Others have a little something extra. Find what you need to boost your inner voice.

Prather has her MIT class ring. She wears it while teaching on the first day. Its message comes through loud and clear. "It says I've paid my dues. It says I'm credentialed, so don't test me," she says. "That you don't have a right to question my right to be here instructing you."

- Believe in who you are, not what they expect.

"When you are establishing yourself, you want to make a strong argument that you are supposed to be there and there is no reason why you shouldn't be in charge," says Novella Bridges, senior research scientist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. "You want to make sure your reputation is what it should be and not maybe what they assume it to be."