

## Casebook: Collaboration

<p>This role play involves an “Honest Principal Investigator” who is collaborating on a grant proposal with a “Dishonest Principal Investigator” at another institution who wants to drop data points.</p> <p><b>Roles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Honest Principal Investigator</li><li>• Dishonest Principal Investigator</li><li>• Colleague – Honest Principal Investigator’s Trusted Other</li></ul> <p><b>Scenarios</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scenario One: Discussion between both principal investigators</li><li>• Scenario Two: Honest Principal Investigator meets with a Trusted Other</li></ul>	<p><b>Role Play Tips</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detailed role descriptions and prompts are provided to guide the role play. This is not a strict script. Encourage role players to familiarize themselves with their characters and get creative!</li><li>• Encourage role players to use their actual names in place of character names.</li><li>• Experiment with changing the prompts to inject some variability in role play dynamics (e.g., have a character offer a conciliatory opening line or a belligerent opening line to see how that changes the course of the role play).</li><li>• Run a role play more than once, changing role players.</li></ul>
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### Role Play: Honest Principal Investigator Role Guide

#### Character Description: The Honest Principal Investigator

You are a successful mid-career scientist who has recently been promoted to full Professor. Although you are used to working alone, you are starting to realize that it is beneficial to collaborate once in a while with others. An up-and-coming but somewhat brash Associate Professor suggests that you write a grant proposal together and plan to work as co-PIs if funded. At first, you are surprised at this invitation because of some past history with this colleague. Years before, when you both were Assistant Professors, s/he had been accused of making up data, but no formal investigation occurred. You had openly voiced your disapproval of his/her data management practices. Shortly afterward, you took a new position in a different department and let bygones be bygones.

In the end, you set aside your initial misgivings since the research idea s/he is proposing is too good to pass up. You accept his/her invitation and develop a research proposal together that gets funded. As you begin collaborating, your junior colleague finds many ways to let you know that s/he is in charge. You notice that s/he is often critical of you, but you try very hard to get along without letting him/her dominate you.

Soon, methodological disputes arise. First, s/he proposes that you change the research procedure in ways that will favor one of your main hypotheses. You try very tactfully to explain to him/her that biased

sampling is not appropriate. You ignore his/her requests even though s/he puts you down for being a goodie-two-shoes.

Then, as you are gathering your preliminary data, s/he instructs you to delete certain cases. Suddenly, you've had enough. You tell him/her point blank that what s/he is suggesting that you do is dishonest—in fact, you say the only plausible reason for his/her request is that those cases do not support your hypothesis. You tell him/her in no uncertain terms that there is no way you'll delete those cases.

S/he threatens dire consequences if you cross him/her on this.

### **Role Play: Dishonest Principal Investigator Role Guide**

#### **Character Description: The Dishonest PI**

You are stalled at the level of Associate Professor. You have seen others zoom up the tenure track, and you believe you need to be even more aggressive if you're going to get ahead. You're determined to let nothing and no one stand in your way. You brush away the uncomfortable fact that you have not been very productive in your career. You think you can remedy this by riding on the coat-tails of someone slightly higher up than you.

You've invited a very capable colleague to work with you on a project for which you submitted a grant proposal and were funded. You are sure you can use this talented researcher to do the work for you. You actually know him/her from before, when you were both Assistant Professors, though you haven't forgotten that s/he came out smelling like roses on a project you both were involved in while you got shafted by the tenure-review committee. Still, you know s/he is naïve and easily intimidated. The advantage of getting this researcher to cook the data is that (a) you won't get the blame if the misdeed is caught, and (b) you can blackmail your co-Principal Investigator if that turns out to be useful.

You establish your authority by ordering your co-Principal Investigator around. Your colleague seems to be accepting this, though grudgingly. S/he has this idea that collaboration is a way of consolidating a relationship. The only thing you want is results. When the data don't match the hypothesis, you try to get your colleague to change the research procedure in ways that will favor it. Your colleague objects, pointing out that biased sampling is cheating, but you hold your ground and insist that s/he is over-reacting. Your study is still in the early stages, and you're still "tweaking" the data.

Once you begin analyzing the data, you see that if a few cases are thrown out, your hypothesis will be affirmed. You instruct your colleague to delete those cases. S/he refuses, once again indicating that it's dishonest to force the data to affirm a hypothesis. "There is no way those cases will be thrown out," s/he says flatly.

You wheel around and this time threaten your colleague if s/he crosses you on this. You realize that now is the time when you absolutely must have your way.

## **Role Play: Colleague Role Guide**

### **Character Description: Colleague (Trusted other)**

You are a senior professor and a long-term friend and confidant of the Honest Principal Investigator. While you have never experienced exactly this kind of thing, you find it quite believable that the other person would behave in this fashion.

The following are the kinds of questions an insightful colleague might consider asking:

- Are you worrying too much? What could your Co-Principal Investigator do to you if you refused to falsify the data?
- Why do you think s/he is trying to force you to commit the scientific misconduct rather than committing it him/herself?
- Do you think this situation calls for tact? Or something more forceful?
- Do you want to go to ombudsperson or department chair? What are pros and cons?
- This person sounds like trouble. Are you sure you want to continue this collaboration?

### **Scenario One**

The two PI's are standing in the lab glaring at one another.

#### **Prompt:**

*The Honest Principal Investigator:* "There is no way I'm deleting those data!"

*The Dishonest Principal Investigator:* "And I'm warning you, don't cross me on this!"

*Honest Principal Investigator:* How do you respond?

### **Scenario Two**

The Honest Principal Investigator storms out of the lab, slamming the door, and goes to his/her own office, locks the door and phones a trusted colleague who knows the Dishonest Principal Investigator and is generally aware of his/her sleazy qualities. The Honest Principal Investigator phones the Trusted Colleague and briefly describes what has transpired and begins to seek counsel.

#### **Prompt**

*Honest Principal Investigator:* "I am so glad I was able to reach you. I've got to figure out how to stop that SOB in his/her tracks! I just don't want to stop this research project or engage in any fabrication and falsification. What should I do?"

*Trusted Colleague:* How do you respond?

#### **Take Away Point:**

- The Honest Principal Investigator could have avoided this headache had they declined to work with the Dishonest Principal Investigator, a person they knew to be unscrupulous, from the onset. Still, the Honest Principal Investigator acted appropriately by immediately seeking help once the Dishonest Principal Investigator clearly signaled an intent to breach ethical research standards. Given the volatile state of the relationship between the two researchers, it may be appropriate for a moderator to step in and help the researchers decide on the best course of action. It would likely be in the best interest of the Honest Principal Investigator to discontinue working with the Dishonest Principal Investigator to the extent possible.