Editorial

Announcement – The fake meeting society

It all started with an invitation from Cindy (or Bob or Eva, I can’t recall). My work in the field of “enzymatic catalysis” was recognised and I was kindly invited to give a lecture at a forthcoming meeting organized a year later. I was of course flattered but kindly answered that I had to decline as I barely knew what an enzyme was – had not approached the damned thing for a long time. However, gullible as I was, I also indicated that one session of this multi-topic conference was more appropriate for me. Within minutes, I received an updated invitation from Cindy (or Bob or Eva, still can’t recall). I was now a plenary lecturer in a session dealing with nucleic acids. I felt competent and important. Great!

Still, a few things puzzled me. Like receiving another invitation later for the same meeting but a different session.... Or repetitive reminders culminating at one per day, to benefit from a reduced registration fee. I forgot to mention: I was invited, sure... but invited to pay as well. However, as I fail to understand why the inscription for post docs or students should cover classy hotels for the few selected speakers, I did not complain. Of course, everything was in US $ and seemed (moderately) affordable. I did not check the actual cost of living in the country and realize that this package was everything but inexpensive.

A few months later the conference started. I was there right on time. I was a bit disappointed when I failed to identify Cindy (or Bob or Eva) within the organizers for one simple reason: there were no organizers present! The best way to deal with complaints was to have no one around to hear them. As simple as that. The whole meeting and sessions were (dis)organized; parallel sessions held at random places, in rooms either far too big or far too small and on screens more appropriate for a family projection than for science. The official banquet was an interestingly short and noisy event, allowing us to discover local alcoholic beverages labelled as wine (OK, maybe as I live near Bordeaux you may consider that I have pompous standards about what may be called wine or not). One of my best souvenirs was when a colleague of mine was cordially invited to sit for the official congress picture, but only discovered later that it was for another meeting (yes: not only were there parallel sessions, but parallel meetings as well). At least two things were of professional level, though: our chairman and the videos that recorded all talks – I do not recall giving consent but as I did not betray any state secret, I naively assumed it was not so important. Our chairman actually nicely prepared his session and gave the false impression that the whole thing was not completely improvised. I am still wondering if he paid a registration fee as well. I assume when/if they manage to attach a few unfortunate Nobel prize winners to the official list, they don’t pay registration, do they?

Back home, checking how much I spent on the whole thing, and after a quick assessment of the actual cost and probable margin made, I wondered: why not me? Could I do the same and earn serious money? Or go a step further in cost savings, and organize a meeting that would never happen? Some of us are in bad need of invitations to international conferences, and a few honours and prizes won’t harm the CV. So why not organize a meeting in which everything would be virtual but the registration fee?

Hence the idea of the Fake Meeting Society (FameS). This learned society will have one primary goal: to sponsor pseudo scientific events (not) held in exotic places. Its inaugural meeting will be held somewhere in February, 29–31, 2012. You are all invited to participate and become FameouS. Priority will be given to scientists publishing in top journals such as Biochimie, although this is not mandatory. Those who have not published anything for the last two decades may still give lectures – I have witnessed that thanks to Cindy (or Bob or...). Depending on the amount you are willing to pay, you will be listed as plenary, keynote, or ordinary speaker. The theme is actually not important as long as it is wide enough and you can propose your own sessions... think big! Or as an alternative, let’s assume we organize a medical conference; you simply have to list all possible major diseases and organize sessions accordingly. Add an extra session “other diseases”, just in case. If willing to pay more, we may even invent a prize for you: you will then receive an official diploma in pdf format from FameS! (framed printed copies with gold font for 150 euro supplement only).

The take home message is the following: if you receive an invitation from Cindy (or Bob, or Eva... or Jean-Louis) make sure they are officially affiliated with the Fake Meeting Society. Otherwise there is a slim chance that the conference is for real and that you may learn something. I personally guarantee it won’t be the case if sponsored by FameS! A still unresolved question is to decide whether a congress may receive the FameS sponsorship without asking for it. Given the massive enthusiasm behind the creation of this society this question is likely to be rhetorical only, as most events will actively seek this label. To become an active member, send donations – cash preferred – to the self-proclaimed president of FameS. Reduced registration fee until April 11!

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