

Wolfe-Simon collecting sediment in her "office"—the Baylands Nature Preserve in Palo Alto, California

This Rising Star's Four Rules for You

NASA scientist Felisa Wolfe-Simon, Ph.D., 34, made headlines when she discovered possible evidence of extraterrestrial life. She shares her four laws of getting people to believe in you.

BY ANNIE GOWEN

Felisa Wolfe-Simon is not your average science geek: She plays the electric bass, tweets under the handle ironlisa and wears a nose ring. But last year the NASA astrobiologist led a team that published a study offering compelling evidence of the possibility of life on other planets. The results sparked controversy in the scientific community, but Wolfe-Simon, who lives in the Bay Area with her junior-high sweetheart turned husband (aww!), stayed above the fray and focused on her work. Her advice for keeping your eye on the ball:

No. 1

Focus on What You Don't Like

"Ask yourself: What's the part of my job I like the least, and why? If it's because you're not good at it, practice. You'll get better!" says Wolfe-Simon. "I've had to relearn things that at the time I thought, I can't stomach any more of this." Concentrating on your weaknesses is the best way to get past them—and move up, she says. Besides, "you may end up being great at the tasks you couldn't wait to get away from."

No. 2

Don't Suck Up, Read Up

Before her NASA study underwent a rigorous peer review, Wolfe-Simon made sure to introduce herself to "rock-star scientists" at conferences, telling them she admired their work before asking for their feedback on hers. "If you're looking for advice from a heavy-weight in your field," she says, "you have to show that you've taken the time to learn what they've done—and cite specific examples!"

No. 3

Find Your Creative Spirit

Wolfe-Simon grew up in Miami as the daughter of a trumpeter and says music is crucial to getting her creative juices flowing—she's been known to blast Eminem and Macy Gray in the research lab. She also credits her success in science to her training as a classical oboist. "I think that music and arts—watching *South Park* counts!—should be a part of everyone's life, regardless of what you do for a living," she says.

No. 4

Share the Credit

Though Wolfe-Simon was singled out when her study was released, she said it was really a team effort. "It's not about accolades or rank," she says. "In fact, it's not about me, period. We each had our strengths, and together we could answer more interesting questions and do cooler things than we could have on our own. Knowing how to collaborate may be your most important skill."

STYLIST: RACHAEL WANG; HAIR AND MAKEUP: YVETTE SWALLOW FOR AUBRI BALK; FILSON VEST AND BACKPACK; CURRENT/Elliott; SHORTS; BARBOUR SOCKS; LL BEAN BOOTS