

## TIBBS Career Blitz Career Profile Questionnaire

1. Please provide your name and employer:

Steve Griffith  
Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine

2. What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?

3. MSL Field Director, Rheumatology MSL Team  
2.5 Years as a Field Director

4. Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?

I received my PhD at the University of Virginia in Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics

5. Did you do a postdoc?

No. I chose to pursue a Fellowship Program through GSK Vaccines instead.

6. What are your main daily responsibilities?

I manage a team of MSLs, Sr MSLs, and Principal MSLs spread across the Southeastern United States. I work to develop overarching strategy, provide field coaching, lead Medical Affairs and/or Therapeutic Area initiatives, and contribute as member of the broader Immunology MSL Leadership team.

7. What are the keys to success in your career field?

In brief, the following skills are critical:

- a) Self Motivation/Internal Drive. The MSL role is largely autonomous and you need to be comfortable operating in an environment where you are the sole driver behind projects, initiatives, and/or other deliverables.
- b) Presentation Skills: You need to be able to craft and weave an engaging or compelling story, beyond just reading bulletpoints from slides. Most importantly, you need to be able to translate how data, graphs, statistics, etc from clinical trials or other studies is relevant and may have an impact on an individual Healthcare Provider's practice. Further, you need to be comfortable talking deep science with academics and then be able to pivot and talk broad strokes to those without a strong scientific background.
- c) Personability. This role is all about engaging with people, striking up and carrying a conversation, building a relationship, and understanding what specific medical information need exists and/or what scientific interest someone has, and then helping to connect the dots. You don't need to be an

extrovert, but you have to be willing to start up a conversation with a stranger.

8. What were the most important factors in choosing your career path and current employer?

Job specifics, salary, and work-life balance. As an MSL, I got paid to talk science – how cool is that? And I just get to share the relevant clinical data – at the end of the day, my job is not to make a sale, but to share information relevant to patients suffering from Autoimmune Diseases. As a manager, my job has shifted a bit towards mentoring and coaching but ultimately I picked this career path because I enjoyed talking science and found a huge amount of fulfillment in being able to directly impact patient care through medical education and clinical trial research via conversations.

I also picked (and have stuck with!) this career path because of the flexibility it offers me in terms of work life balance, and frankly because MSLs get paid extremely well. I have kids, and having a career where I could be *present* was really important to me. Even with the travel associated with the MSL role (which is not as bad as it sounds), I was still able to coach my son's Tball team and my daughter's soccer team. I'm (still) able to do lunch with my wife most days during the week, and set my schedule so that I am home for the important things. Plus, since the MSL role is a field based position, I can live anywhere I want within the territory. And as an MSL, you have the flexibility to live really anywhere within your assigned territory, which is awesome.

9. What activities (if any) did you participate in that helped you be successful in obtaining your job?

Rather than do a Postdoc, I joined the GSK Vaccines R&D Future Leaders program following graduation (now called Scientific Leaders Program). This allowed me to do "rotations" through different departments over the course of 2 years and experience some of the vast array of career opportunities available in Pharma outside of traditional bench R&D. Medical Affairs (and specifically the MSL role) was just one of those rotations, but it was by far my favorite.

I will also say I did an internship in Tech Transfer during my PhD, which helped to introduce me to some of the different external-facing roles Pharma has. While I ultimately didn't pursue that as my career path, I really enjoyed my time there and credit that as being my first foray and experience with nontraditional PhD career paths.

10. What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?

1) Network. Cliché, right? But it's true. Get on LinkedIn, or the Alumni page, or reach out to speakers at programs like these afterwards. The MSL role is extremely competitive, and PhDs are competing with PharmDs, DNPs, MDs, and others for the

positions. You need to start building your network, so find MSLs on LinkedIn, send them a short message asking for 15-20 minutes, and do an informational interview. Full disclosure – we as MSLs get a lot of these requests, so there's a good chance your response rate will be low, but every person who replies back affirmatively helps you to lay the foundation of your future network.

2) Get some exposure to experiences outside of the bench. Volunteer at the UNC Office of Clinical Trials. Ask your PI if there is a clinical trial you can get involved with (even data entry!), or if they know of someone you could talk to. Your Therapeutic Area (TA) experience is great and will make you competitive for an MSL role, but the more you can do to stand out, to be different, and to gain unique experiences, then the better off you will be.

**11. How is the work/life balance in your career field and how much of a factor was that in your career choice?**

See Question 8 above. In summary, I found a phenomenal Work/Life balance and it was a major factor for me in deciding on my career path.

I hope that every survey you read and every candidate you hear from, speak to, or listen to, feels this way about their job; but, I so strongly believe the MSL role is one of the best (if not THE best) job a PhD can get in industry when considering job specifics, work/life balance, salary, geographic location, sense of fulfillment, and sheer fun of the job. I think this is an amazing career path, and I recommend it without reservation.