

What BioBusiness Summer School taught me about transitioning to industry

A year ago, I probably would have found it hard to imagine a world where my day would be less about capturing image stacks and more about stacked calendars. Yet here I was—a freshly minted postdoc who had stepped out of academia's familiar chaos into the vast, varied world of industry. And judging by the crowd at Hyphen Project's BioBusiness Summer School 2025, I wasn't alone. The room brimmed with PhDs and postdocs plotting their own moves beyond the bench, CVs ready and LinkedIn pages gleaming.

The "great migration" from academia to industry isn't just a trend anymore—it's practically a rite of passage. Some are drawn to startups where one person wears five hats; others prefer the stability and reach of big pharma. And many simply wonder: what happens when you take a scientist out of the lab but not the science out of the scientist?

What I've learned—through my own leap and from the stories around me—is that no two transitions look the same. Some use postdoc years as a springboard; others skip it altogether. Startups often value versatile academic skill sets, while larger companies increasingly appreciate analytical agility and persistence—qualities honed by research life itself.

So, whether you dream of launching a biotech startup or joining a global firm, this is my perspective as a former postdoc: a candid snapshot of that uneasy, exciting space between science and business—and how one program helped make sense of it.

The BioBusiness Summer School: Learning the Language of Industry

When a former colleague recommended the BioBusiness Summer School in the Netherlands, I went in with modest expectations. I imagined it as another entrepreneurial boot camp, but it turned out to be a compact masterclass on how life sciences and business intersect. In five intensive days, we covered everything from IP and venture capital to regulatory affairs, business models, program management, and personal branding. More importantly, it offered unflinching insight

into what it truly takes to move from academia to industry.

Lessons from the Frontlines

The first lesson? **It's not you—it's the market.** Understanding macroeconomic currents matters. When ECB interest rates rose post 2022, funding dried up, hiring slowed, and competition stiffened. You can excel technically, but if you ignore market realities, frustration follows.

Second, not all "obvious" transitions are straightforward. Writing and communication roles attract many academics but are often oversaturated. Knowing the nuances between a medical writer, technical writer, or science editor can make or break your strategy.

Preparation emerged as another recurring theme—especially for internationals facing visa and cultural barriers. One speaker's advice stuck with me: build it before you need to bank on it. Networking, learning, and developing "power skills" (as opposed to "soft skills")—communication, adaptability, and self awareness—pay long term dividends in any industrial role.

Balancing Freedom and Structure

A memorable session by the CTO of Single Cell Discoveries focused on generational dynamics in the workplace. Managing millennials and Gen Z, he said, means balancing freedom and responsibility. His hiring philosophy—choose character and aptitude over experience—was refreshingly pragmatic, especially for startups or scale ups. As postdocs, we often underestimate the edge our curiosity and rapid learning provide. Still, bridging communication gaps across generations remains vital to effective teamwork.

Pathways Beyond the Bench

What inspired me most were the diverse transition stories. One alumnus shared how he started as a part time business developer, leveraging his academic network until he moved full time. Others pursued academic consultancy, partnering with TTOs to broker public private collaborations. These examples showed there's no single "right" way out of academia—only creative, well timed entries. Entrepreneurship, too, wore many faces. Some



started companies out of passion, others out of sheer frustration. Whatever the motivation, aligning vision with sustainability was the common thread.

The Science of Staying Relevant

The week closed with a keynote from Jaan Winkel, CEO of Genmab, whose story tied it all together. He spoke of two scientist archetypes: the curiosity driven and the application driven. The latter, he said, often thrive in biotech or pharma, where discoveries turn tangible faster. His emphasis on evolution—adapting as Genmab moved from research to commercialization—felt especially relevant for anyone reinventing themselves. Despite leading a global organization, his message stayed grounded: success comes from sharp focus and a genuine commitment to improving patient lives.

My Takeaway

Leaving academia isn't merely about changing jobs—it's a mindset shift. The BioBusiness Summer School turned an intimidating unknown into a map of opportunities built on adaptability, collaboration, and purpose. It reminded me that while we may leave the bench, the habits that make us scientists—resilience, curiosity, and critical thinking—are precisely what help us thrive beyond it.