Career Planning: No Scientist Left Behind

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Knowing when to say yes, knowing when to say no: Strategies for Success

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Your journey: where are you going?

• Define your goals
  • Short-term and long-term
  • Personal and professional
    • Postdoc position
    • Faculty position or private sector
    • Promotion to associate professor
    • Promotion to professor
    • Academic leadership positions
    • Professional association/organization leadership positions

• Consider your values
• Consider the values of your institution
  • Know the promotion and tenure requirements
  • Understand the culture of the institution

• Re-evaluate your goals annually
Your journey: how do I get there?

• Consider knowledge and skills needed for the journey
  • Do I need additional training in lab techniques or other skills?
  • Do I need an additional degree or coursework?
  • Do I need leadership development training?
  • Do I need better teaching skills?

• Consider who you need to know along the way
  • Mentors and advisors
  • Collaborators
  • Within the institution and outside the institution

• Consider stops along the way and detours
Strategies

• Seek opportunities for learning
  • Additional coursework
  • Collaborating with other scientists
  • Seminars on teaching
  • Research seminars
  • Leadership programs through the University or professional organizations
Strategies

• Seek opportunities for networking and service
  • Within your department
    • Collaborate and share with students and faculty
  • Within your college
    • Volunteer for committees
    • Volunteer for teaching activities in other departments/colleges
  • Within your university
  • Within professional organizations
    • Volunteer for committees
    • Sign up to review abstracts for meetings
    • Sign up to review for journals
Strategies

• Develop your reputation and your profile
  • In person
  • In social media
  • With colleagues and with students

• But….Protect yourself

• But...Don’t get discouraged

• Are these opportunities helping you on your journey or are they detours?

• When in doubt
  • Talk to your chair
  • Talk to colleagues
  • Talk to your mentor/advisor
Scenario 1

• You are a graduate student and planning your dissertation. Your research interests align with Dr. X, who is the most productive scholar in your department. Should you approach him/her to serve as your advisor?
Things to think about.....

• Talk to other students who have worked with Dr. X. Is Dr. X accessible, supportive, and provides constructive feedback? What is the usual timeframe to completion for the students of Dr. X? Does Dr. X encourage his students to write their own manuscripts?

• Does Dr. X believe that you are PhD material?

• Can Dr. X effectively manage your other potential committee members? How does Dr. X treat students who are mentored by other professors in the department?

• Does Dr. X have sufficient funding for your position or will you be required to serve as a teaching assistant?
Scenario 2

• You are applying to postdoc positions and expect to defend your dissertation soon. You have two offers. One is a smaller tier 2 institution close to home. Dr. Y has a productive lab and a good record of grants and publications. The second offer is from a top tier institution, 1000 miles from home, and from Dr. Z, an internationally known scholar. What should you do?
Things to think about....

• What are your goals, both personal and professional? How important is location?
• What is the track record for post docs in each institution? Do they stay in the post doc position for three years or more, or do they successfully move on to faculty positions? How long have current post docs been in the department?
• How is the position funded and what are the expectations for you?
• What are the criteria that Dr. Y and Dr. Z use to assign first authorship?
• Where are former post docs employed?
Scenario 3

• You are an assistant professor in year 4. You will be up for promotion next year. You’ve been asked to represent your department in a University wide committee on interprofessional education. Should you accept?
Things to think about....

• How’s your promotion and tenure dossier? Do you need more publications, presentations, teaching or service? How would this committee service strengthen your dossier?

• Who is the chair of this committee? Is he/her efficient in use of time? Does the committee have a timeline? Are their members of this committee that could help you in the future? Is there an opportunity for scholarship with the committee’s work?

• Is this topic of interest to you? Could it lead to more opportunities?
Scenario 4

• You are an assistant professor in year 4. There is a position open as coordinator of an integrated course sequence and you have been offered it. It pays a modest stipend. Should you accept?
Things to think about...

• How’s your promotion and tenure dossier? Do you need more publications, presentations, teaching or service? How would this activity strengthen your dossier?

• How much time will this activity take? How will this affect your teaching and course evaluations? Will it prevent you from finishing some papers? Is this a multi-year commitment?

• How do you feel about this course sequence? Are you excited about the opportunity to revise it and make it special? Is there an opportunity for scholarship connected with this course sequence?

• Does the coordinator have any authority over the others teaching in the course? Will the Chair support you if you have faculty on your team that are not meeting deadlines?

• Does it require learning new technology and if so, do you have the time/interest to learn it?
Scenario 5

• You are an assistant professor in year two. You’ve been invited to serve on a search committee for a new faculty member in another department. Should you accept?
Things to think about…

• How’s your promotion and tenure dossier? Do you need more publications, presentations, teaching or service? How would this activity strengthen your dossier?

• Is there already a preferred candidate? If so, what value is the search committee?

• Who is chairing the committee and who are the other members? Can these individuals help you along your journey?
Scenario 6

• You are an assistant professor in year 2. You’ve been invited to assist on a grant with a senior faculty member. Should you accept?
Things to think about....

• How’s your promotion and tenure dossier? Do you need more publications, presentations, teaching or service? How would this activity strengthen your dossier?

• Who is the PI? What is his/her reputation? Would they give you appropriate credit for your work?

• Do you have the opportunity to outline clear responsibilities and time lines?

• How would this project interfere with your own work?

• Would this be a good learning experience for you?
How to say Yes

• Before saying yes, consider:
  • Know the facts and the personalities
  • Do I need to negotiate a reduced teaching load in order to accomplish this task?
  • Is a title change appropriate for this task?
  • Will this activity receive “credit” in my annual performance review?
  • Will this activity add to my promotion and tenure dossier?
  • Is there an opportunity to negotiate a piece of equipment that you need?
How to say No

• Before saying no, consider:
  • Be clear about why you are declining the opportunity
  • Communicate that you are open to other opportunities in the future
  • The impact of your decision on others in the department. What is the potential fall-out of this decision? Consider unintended consequences.
  • Suggest alternative solutions
    • Other people for the task
    • Other solutions to the task
    • Other timelines for the task
You know you are ready for a leadership position when:

• You understand that helping others do their work is your work
• You are ready to provide opportunities to others
• You are not afraid to make decisions knowing you don’t have or never will have all the information
• You are ready for a new challenge
• You understand that managing culture is one of your most important responsibilities
  • Positive attitude
  • Collaboration
  • Respect of faculty governance
  • Communicate, consistently, constantly, positively
Scenario 7

• You are an associate professor interested in leadership opportunities. There is an assistant dean position in student services open. It involves lots of evening/weekend hours supervising student activities. Should you apply?
Things to think about....

• What is my long-term goal? Department Chair? Dean? Provost? Typically promotions occur from the academic side.

• What is my personal situation? Can I give up so many evenings and weekends?

• What about your research? Can you maintain your research lab or no? How will that affect promotion to professor?

• Do you anticipate other opportunities arising in the near future?
Scenario 8

• You are an associate professor interested in leadership opportunities. You are repeatedly overlooked by your Chair when leadership opportunities arise (such as chairing committees, developing new initiatives). There is an assistant dean position open in your college. Should you apply for it?
Things to think about....

• What are the responsibilities of this position? Have previous assistant deans been promoted or do they return to faculty? Why is this position open?

• Do I need to work with the Chairs to accomplish tasks and goals? If so, can I work with my current Chair?

• What teaching responsibilities will I have?

• Will I be able to continue with research?

• What about promotion to professor?

• Am I prepared for this position and who will mentor me?
My story, or how I got from the snowman to Dean
Lessons learned

• Battle the imposter syndrome
  • Believe in yourself
  • Have confidence

• Establish goals and re-evaluate annually

• Take risks and advantage of opportunities, but

• Stay focused on your goals and values

• Find mentors

• Never stop learning

• Its all about people
Thank you and All the Best on your journey!