

Postdoc Academic Chat #6

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T GET ANY JOB OFFERS?

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Questions/Discussion Items to Consider

- * What options make the most sense for you if you don't initially get the offer you want?**
- * What are some of the experiences you know about of other postdocs who have found career options outside academia**
- * What are some of the things you can do now before the end of your postdoc to broaden your prospects for a successful academic career?**

Readings

#1 What to do if You Don't Get the Offer You Want?

#2 I Didn't Get the Job. Can I Ask Why?

#3 Should I Go Back on the Academic Job Market?

#1 What to do if You Don't Get the Offer You Want?

The article below is an excerpt from the book *Preparing for Academic Careers in Science and Engineering*, by Richard M. Reis, IEE Press, 1997. (references cited available on request.)

Suppose that after all your time and hard work, not to mention emotional effort, you end up without a job offer or with an offer that you cannot accept. What do you do now? First, understand that it is certainly normal to feel disappointment, anger, rejection,

worry, and even embarrassment. Under such circumstances we naturally look for someone, or something, to blame, including ourselves.

Perhaps you didn't get an offer because someone on the search committee disliked you from the start, you were asked all the wrong questions during your interview, or the winning candidate was known before the search began and the department was just going through the motions. You might imagine that your advisor wrote a less than glowing letter of recommendation, or that he/she is to blame for admitting you into a Ph.D. program in the first place with out knowing, or caring, about the poor job market.

If the above doesn't make you feel better, you can always blame yourself. Should you have researched the department more thoroughly, written a better cover letter, given a better academic job talk, or not asked for so much support? And now what about the future? Has all this work been for nothing, and will you ever get the kind of job that you want?

All these reactions are normal, and indeed expected. If you don't accept them and deal with them now it will only take you longer to move on to the next stage. Talking with others is usually a good way to start. You are certainly not alone and knowing that you aren't will help. Most of the time it has little or nothing to do with you. I have been on a number of search committees and have talked to many others who have also served on such committees, and in most cases we would have gladly taken our second , or even third choice if it had come to that. This fact may not make you feel any better, but it should. If it applies to you, then your chances of getting a job the next time round are certainly better, particularly if you learn from your recent experience.

The decision to try again

First you have to decide if there will be a next time, if you want to try again. I would certainly hope that you do. Pursuing an academic career is too important a matter, and you have too much already invested to stop now. Next year will most likely be a different job market and you will be a different candidate. You will have finished your dissertation, or published more articles, or have your dissertation revised and accepted for publication. You may have a year or more of postdoc experience. You may have some additional teaching experience. Evidence shows that for most candidates, persistence does pay off. [12]

The next step is to consider the possibility that one of the reasons you didn't get an offer was in fact because of something you did or didn't do.

A recent postdoc in high-energy physics applied to a number of schools for beginning assistant professorships in physics. He wrote what he thought were very effective, targeted cover letters, emphasizing his interest in the school and in undergraduate teaching. His CV pointed to the teaching experience he had acquired at night in a local community college. Yet, in spite of all his thought and effort he received rejection letters from every school to which he applied. Disappointed as he was, he mustered the courage to call each school. After some prodding, he learned that as soon as the search committee saw, "high- energy physics," at the top of his application, they put it in the reject pile. As

noted in Chapter 8, most schools have no openings for faculty who want to do high-energy physics research because they have no facilities for such work. This applicant was far more interested in just teaching physics, but he never got a chance to make his case. On his second round of applications - which to date have resulted in two job interviews - he rewrote his resume to de-emphasize high-energy physics while emphasizing his physics background in general, and his teaching experience in particular.

Not all changes are this simple of course. To get the information you need in order to decide what to do, begin by contacting the people to whom you sent applications or with whom you interviewed. Try and learn what you might do in the future to improve your candidacy. You owe it to yourself to obtain this feedback and you can get it if you ask for it in the right way. (You can also ask a third party, such as your advisor, to make some inquiries on your behalf.) Most people will want to assure you that it wasn't you, that they simply had a more appropriate candidate or that they were looking for a particular specialty that you didn't have.

Don't settle for such limited feedback. Explain that you will be applying to other schools in the future and that you would appreciate any specific insights that would enable you to make a better case. Put this way you are likely to get responses that begin, "I thought your cover letter was pretty good, but a couple things you could do are...." or "Your job talk went well except that you spent too much time.....". This kind of feedback can make a real difference the next time you apply for positions. It could even get you a new look at the schools which turned you down.

Examining your options

A major theme of this book has been the employment of the Multiple-Option approach by which you prepare for possible positions in government and industry at the same time you prepare for a career in academia. There are two reasons for following this approach:

- (1) Given the relative weakness in the academic job market, such preparation increases your chances of professional employment after graduation or after a period as a postdoc.
- (2) Such preparation actually enhances your attractiveness as an academic candidate because interactions with industry and government are becoming a necessity for many science and engineering professors.

If you have followed the approach outlined in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 and the recommendations in Chapters 7, and 8, then hopefully you will have generated some options that fall within one of three categories:

- (1) Staying in your present graduate student or postdoc position, with some modifications for an additional one or two years.
- (2) Moving on to another, but still temporary position.
- (3) Moving on to a more permanent position.

Staying where you are, with some modifications, relieves you of the effort required to meet new people and adjust to new surroundings. This arrangement has its pluses and minuses. If you use the time to concentrate on the additional things you can do to make yourself a stronger applicant, then it can be an advantage. If you use it to just do more of what you have already done then it will be of limited value.

Rick Vinci had just finished his Ph.D. in materials science at Stanford University. As he approached the end of his studies he considered applying for positions in both industry and academia. However, his wife, Michelle, was a Ph.D. student in Spanish at Stanford and two years from finishing her degree. Vinci really needed to stay in the area while she completed her work. Then both of them could look for academic positions. He knew staying on as a postdoc with the same person who was his dissertation advisor had its drawbacks, so he decided to do so only if he could:

- have the opportunity to publish additional articles on his thesis topic, an area in which no start-up time was required,
- identify another area of research, different from that of his dissertation in which he could establish expertise,
- generate research proposals in this new area,
- have full responsibility for teaching a course, and
- mentor both graduate and undergraduate students.

Vinci was able to take advantage of what, and who, he already knew and at the same time significantly expand his portfolio for the academic job search to follow.

At the same time, moving to another position puts you in a different setting with different people and this might afford you the opportunity to look for an academic position from a new perspective. One possibility is a full-time teaching position with a fixed term appointment.

Sally Veregge was older than the typical doctoral student when she received her Ph.D. She had had many years of experience in the health care industry when she entered a doctoral program and could have easily gone back to such a position. As it turned out, San Jose State University in San Jose, California liked to hire people with experience, at least in biology. Veregge was not offered a full-time tenure-track job (someone else got it) but was offered a full-time temporary position. There was the potential for a tenure-track position when the temporary job ended, but certainly no guarantee. Veregge asked that they evaluate her annually in the same way as they would have for a tenure-track position so if such a position opened up, she would have a good chance of getting it. During her two year temporary period she was treated in every way like a regular faculty member.

Two years later she did get the tenure-track position after it was advertised and she applied for it like everyone else.

Another possibility is a temporary position in government or industry.

After completing her Ph.D. at Columbia University in biology, Cynthia Hemmenway decided to join a postdoc program at Monsanto which has a reputation for its research strengths in plant biology. 'I had a really good feeling that I would be able to do well there in terms of publishing, be in an area that is moving quickly, and at the same time learn a little bit more about how companies work,' says Hemmenway, now an assistant professor at North Carolina State University. [13]

If, on the other hand, you do not want to continue to actively apply for academic positions, then it is time to move on to a more permanent position in government or industry. In doing so you might want to keep your options open by teaching part-time at a local college or university in the evening. Such experiences can provide their own rewards while keeping your "credentials" up for possible academic positions that you might want to apply for in the future.

#2 I Didn't Get the Job. Can I Ask Why?

Karen Kelsky is a career consultant who is the founder and president at *The Professor Is In*: <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/618-the-professor-is-in-i-didn-t-get-the-job-can-i-ask-why> and is the author of the book, *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job*. https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00PEPR5LS/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1

July 21, 2014

Well, I didn't get the job. I thought the campus visit was great, but in the end the offer went to someone else. Can I contact the department to find out why?

If you made it to the campus-visit stage, then yes, in my opinion, you can contact the search-committee chair or department chair and ask for some feedback on your candidacy.

But there's a caveat: You have to stick to general, non-desperate sorts of questions. Questions like: "I would like to ask if you can provide any feedback on my materials or visit that would provide insight as I move forward in my job search."

I'll be honest here. I believe that most recipients of such emails probably will not respond at all. Or if they do write back, they'll refrain from providing any substantive feedback. There are two reasons for this. The first is the embarrassment and awkwardness that many faculty feel in the face of unsuccessful candidates for their positions. They would

just as soon you quietly disappear. And then, for those willing to talk, it is likely that HR or affirmative-action rules will prevent them from sharing anything very specific. But even vague feedback can be enormously helpful. I want to encourage job seekers to request it, and search-committee or department chairs to provide it. If a phone call is more comfortable than an email trail, do it that way.

When I was a search chair, and even more when I was a department head, I used to long for certain candidates to contact me afterward so I could alert them to their major bloopers. I didn't go into great detail. But I was able to share a few general points that the candidates really, desperately needed to know about basic serious errors in their approaches. It is vital not to be "nice." Be honest, within the limits of appropriateness: "Your job talk was not well organized, and you seemed unprepared for many of the questions." "You did not relate your research very clearly to the stated foci of the job ad." "You didn't seem to have given much thought to new classes in the area we're trying to develop." "It was difficult to determine your publication trajectory."

Nothing mean or aggressive or gratuitous is necessary here. Just make some factual observations about the outcomes of the visit. I personally think it is an ethical obligation for department or search chairs to provide this kind of feedback to an unsuccessful candidate seeking information.

To candidates, I say: If you've made it to the campus-visit stage, ask for this feedback. (If you've not made it to this stage, though, you should refrain.) Ask without emotionalism that would put the recipient in an awkward position—remember, she will usually feel really, really awful about the people the committee has had to reject. And stay focused not on your own grief and regret about The Job That Got Away (as difficult as that is, I know), but on the things you can do moving forward.

Dear Readers: Have a question about the academic job market and/or professionalization? Send it to me! I welcome any and all questions related to the job market, preparing for the job market while in graduate school, coping with the adjunct struggle, and assistant professorhood. Send questions to me at gettenure@gmail.com.

Karen Kelsky is a career consultant who runs the website *The Professor Is In*. She's been a tenured professor at two public universities (Oregon and Illinois) and has advised many undergraduate and graduate students, as well as mentored junior faculty. She answers reader questions as a contributor to *Vitae*.

For more advice, order Dr. Karen's new book, [The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job](#).

#3 Should I Go Back on the Academic Job Market?

by Dr. Eric Anthony Grollman

November 17, 2015

From Conditionally Accepted: A Space for Scholars on the Margins of Academia
<https://www.insidehighered.com/users/conditionally-accepted>

At a recent conference, three colleagues asked me whether I was currently on the academic job market, and revealed their own ongoing job searches. Their questions echoed a voice in my own head that I've almost successfully silenced: am I supposed to go on the market now, in my third year on the tenure-track?

Initially, I felt offended that they would ask. Their questions about changing institutions were innocent enough — even based on good intentions; but, I couldn't help feeling annoyed because my career choices have been [questioned](#) since I added my current position to the list of jobs to which I would apply. I had to [push back](#) against my grad school professors' "[encouragement](#)" to pursue a career at a [research I](#) university. Since then, I have, on occasion, been not-so-subtly reminded that "you can always go back on the market" (to get a "better" job). As early as spring of my first year, I heard that there were rumors that I had been applying for a new position — in my first year. So, I haven't really had a moment yet in which I wasn't being asked (or [asking myself](#)) whether I could or should go back on the academic job market.

By the end of my first year in graduate school, I became aware of the narrative — perhaps even expectation — that professors, at some point, pursue a "better" job. In just my six years as a grad student, four professors left for new positions, typically right after earning tenure. Initially, it seemed these professors stuck it out to get tenure at that school to then move to a school or location that might be a better fit for them. I've never had a chance to actually ask any of these professors why they left and why, specifically, they left when they did. But, rumors among fellow grad students were that some left because their families were miserable and needed a new location, some threatened to leave to get a raise (but didn't get it, and then had to actually leave), and some left because of the "two-body" problem. These caveats made it seem as though going back on the job market was not solely about the job or institution itself; however, these moves were not driven exclusively by personal reasons, either.

What about assistant professors who change jobs — and not to be immediately promoted to associate professor with tenure at the new institution? That never happened while I was in grad school. But, while on the job market myself, I saw what seemed to be just as many assistant professors vying for jobs as I did grad students. One speculation I commonly heard was that these were "underplaced" scholars who had to take a less-than-desirable job initially owing to the lingering effects of the 2008 recession on the academic job market. Since then, I have seen a couple of colleagues move to higher-ranking institutions, and a few others who moved to accommodate the needs of their partners or children. Generally, I'm not sure that it's [a common occurrence](#). Aside from moving to advance one's professional status (i.e., because one was "underplaced") or because of personal or family needs, there still seems to be an expectation to move — and soon. In hopes of softening the blow that I had decided to accept a position at a liberal arts college, I offered to my advisors that it would be my mistake to make; more explicitly, I noted that I could always go back on the market,

which meant staying active on the publication front (thereby exceeding my own institution's expectations). Two of my professors told me moving happens a lot in academia. (Ironically, they have only been professors at one institution for their entire twenty-plus-year careers.) The three colleagues I mentioned at the start of this essay have their professional or personal reasons for returning to the market; but, I also sensed that they felt they needed to move just because we're expected to move once we hit our third or fourth year on the tenure track.

The short answer to their question is no, I have no desire or plans to apply for other academic positions (or non-academic positions for that matter). But, what the heck, I'll give the long answer, too.

Potential Drawbacks Of Applying For (And Starting) A New Job

- **There is no real reason to leave.** Outside of the academy, I've observed that friends and family begin searching for a new job for practical reasons — that is, I've yet to hear “should” or “supposed to” or “expected to.” They look for a new job to get promoted; that is, when one cannot move up the hierarchical ladder in one's own workplace, one has to take a higher-level position elsewhere. They simply get sick of their current position, owing to boredom, need for change, growing hostility or bias, etc. They cite non-work-related needs like health problems, the needs of their partner/kids/parent (especially if dependent or sick), or having to or want to move to a new city. Fortunately, I accepted a position that brought me closer to my family, offers the pace and expectations I'd like at work (and that are helping me get a handle on lingering mental health problems), and supports my approach to being an academic. My partner has finally started working as a fifth-grade teacher; a move would mean asking him to pick up his life and start over again. Since work is good, why would I disrupt my (and my partner's) life and career just because of some informal expectation to change jobs? That's foolish and selfish.
- **I like my job.** Unless it's not clear from the previous point, I actually [like where I am](#).
- **Starting a new job is hard.** Starting a new job, in a new department and school, in a new city was incredibly hard. Sure, this time I wouldn't also be new to being a professor; but, that's still a lot of new-ness to which I'd have to adjust. I've finally made genuine friendships — those kind in which you hang out outside of work, and have other things besides work to talk about. It only took me two years to find them! And, I'm beginning to feel like a member of the communities in my department, university, and to a tiny extent in my local community (at least among those working for the LGBTQ community). Others may feel invigorated by the adventures of moving and starting a new chapter of their lives, but I dread the idea. The world is not filled with people willing to have genuine friendships or positive working relationships with an outspoken Black queer scholar-activist; my energy is better spent on building community where I am.

- **Starting over is worse.** I am too early in my career to realistically hope to take an associate professor position with tenure at a new institution. So, I'd be starting a new tenure-track elsewhere, with a different set of expectations (formal and informal, transparent and not). Worse, I may "lose" some or all of the years I've already completed on the tenure-track. That is, there is a good chance I would have to start over. No thanks
- **The job market takes up a lot of time.** Starting the application process again would take up a great deal of time. All of my application materials would need to be revised because I can no longer sell how awesome my dissertation is (was). In my job talks, I would need to present new work that, ideally, will last me through tenure. However, I'm currently in the thick of polishing the last couple of chapters of my dissertation and sending them out for publication; I don't have anything really "new" at the moment. And coming up with a new project and rewriting my application materials will cut into time I'm spending to finish work based on my dissertation. I just don't have the time (or energy) to present myself as a new shiny package again.
- **It's too late.** Even if I were interested in applying for other jobs, it's already too late in this year's job market season (in sociology). And, I think it would be foolish to devote any of my year-long research leave next year applying to jobs. By that point, I would be in my fourth year (two years shy of filing for tenure); I would start the new position in my fifth year — the year I would actually begin putting my tenure dossier together.
- **I need to work on my health.** I still suffer from Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and recently discovered I was traumatized by graduate school. (The latter falls into the category of complex trauma, which doesn't appear in the DSM, but its symptoms are no less real for me.) Thanks to these ongoing mental health issues, I was recently diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Wonderful, just wonderful. All of this oversharing of health problems is to highlight that taking care of myself and getting healthy is of far greater importance than worrying about and attempting to appease some informal expectation to find a "better" job. Indeed, my colleagues are aware of my ongoing health problems, and have been incredibly understanding and supportive. Again, why would I give that up? Health wise, it doesn't make sense to reintroduce the stress of applying for jobs, going on interviews, losing sleep because of uncertainty, moving, and starting a new job into my life if it is not necessary. I'd go as far as to say moving around so easily is a luxury for those in good health.
- **The job search is an awful experience.** As I've noted above, the stress of being on the market alone is enough of a deterrent. My anxiety was at its worst while I was on the market in my final year of graduate school. I was moody and self-absorbed. It seemed every conversation I had was about how the market was going — and, if it wasn't, I couldn't help but bring it up. I imagine doing so with some level of secrecy at my current job would be even harder — especially

because I have many more demands on me now than I did as a dissertating grad student who wasn't teaching. My job would have to be bad enough and/or the need for change would have to be severe enough to even consider sticking my toe into the turbulent waters of the job market.

- **I've got baggage.** And, not in that romantic, magical way like Mimi and Roger in Rent. I've been very vocal in my criticisms of the academy, specifically sociology, and most specifically my own graduate program. Do I dare to ask my dissertation committee members for recommendation letters? Would they even say yes? Would they be positive in their letters? Do I even want their letters? With little contact in three years, would their letters even be useful or appropriate? (Baggage aside, I really don't know to whom assistant professors turn when they go on the job market. Asking your current department colleagues seems like a risk if you're secretly apply for jobs, are leaving on bad terms, or don't want to disappoint or hurt them.) Besides the letters, I imagine a number of departments will want nothing to do with me because of my blogging and public presence. Staying active on the research front can only trump concerns about "fit" so much.
- **There are few places that would be a good fit for me.** I am of the mindset that my happiness, health, and quality of life are [more important](#) than the [prestige of a school](#). That means I prefer to work at a school and live in a city that is safe and inclusive for gay interracial couples (my partner and me). Realistically, no place in the US deserves such a characterization, but there is variation. Since climate matters (in the department, on campus, in the city, in the state), that rules out most (all?) places in the country. The odds of finding a [good school](#) in a [hospitable](#) city for me, an outspoken Black queer man, are too slim to waste my time even looking.
- **There are no guarantees on the job market.** Let's say I went on the market next year. I would be limited to the positions that are advertised in that year. They may not fall into my areas of specialization. They may be in undesirable locations. They may include schools for which I don't want to work. I could, in the end, not want to accept any position or, worse, I not receive any job offers. That is time, energy, and hope I can't get back. And, what if word got out in my department or college? Unless I was dead-set on leaving because I had legitimate reasons to do so, it would be incredibly awkward to continue to show my face after the failed job search. I worry, too, other colleagues might consciously or unconsciously hold it against me. Maybe they wouldn't invest as much in me because they assumed I'd be gone the first chance I could get, or that I was never truly invested in staying.
- **Greener grass is deceptive.** I'm going to quote lyrics from two songs. In the song, "Better Than" by The John Butler Trio (JBT), there is an incredible lyric: "All I know is sometimes things can be hard // But you should know by now // They come and they go // So why, oh why // Do I look to the other side // 'Cause I

know the grass is greener but // Just as hard to mow.” And, as Big Sean says in Justin Bieber’s “As Long As You Love Me,” “the grass ain’t always greener on the other side, it’s green where you water it.” JBT’s wisdom points out that a new job [may appear better](#) from your current location, but it won’t necessarily be easier. And, Big Sean’s career advice suggests staying where you are to make the job better, rather than jumping ship when things get tough. My current job, department, and university aren’t perfect — and, I’d be surprised if any of my colleagues are surprised to hear me say that. But, as I surmised from my campus interview when applying, and in the two-and-a-half years since, they are all willing to change and grow. I’m in a place where colleagues don’t remind me of my “place” as a junior faculty member; rather, I’m encouraged to have a voice and be an active member of the campus and department communities. (We’re simply too small to go 7 years of having any faculty members simply “seen but not heard.”) It would be naive of me to think I can just shop around for a problem-free, egalitarian, truly anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, anti-cissexist, anti-fatphobic ... institution. But, it was certainly worth finding a place that is trying to become that, and working within it to make real change.

Potential Drawbacks Of Staying (And My Responses)

Don’t settle. I can already hear concerned voices shouting at their laptops/mobile devices, “NOOO, ERIC – WHAT ARE YOU DOING!” I’ve heard the advice to treat the tenure-track like [dating](#). There’s no ring on this finger (for now), so perhaps I’m naive to settle in this position and, worse, to publicly declare that I’ve settled. (I mean “settle” in the sense of getting comfortable, not as in lowering your standards.) I agree that it’s healthy to know that there are other options and, more importantly, to keep oneself competitive (to an extent) in case the time ever comes to apply for a new job. But, I have learned from experience that a “take-it-or-leave-it” attitude in a relationship takes a toll. It makes others resentful, just waiting for the day that you finally leave or quit; and, you don’t fully reap the rewards of being committed to something/someone, even through the tough or uneventful times. So long as my institution is committed to me, I will commit to it. I sense that we both share the goal of making it a lifelong commitment.

Being taken for granted. I suspect the underlying concern with the previous point is that your colleagues or institution will take you for granted. The best way for them to bow to your feet is keep them guessing whether you plan to stay. If more is desired, you can actually actively seek out a new job — thus, the threat of leaving. Fortunately, I’m in a place that respects and values me because I’m here and committed; I don’t need to play psychological or emotional warfare to demand respect and attention. (Frankly, that seems really unhealthy to me. Imagine if I had to threaten to dump my partner every time I wanted him to buy me flowers.)

Know my value. I’ve heard, on occasion, it’s good to toss an application or two (or

20) out just to see your value (presuming your department or university isn't valuing you at your actual worth). You can get a self-esteem boost from getting interviews, or even offers. Nah, I'm good. I'm working to get to a place where I don't derive any of my self-worth from an institution. That means not suffering six months of depression if I were denied tenure, nor throwing myself a party because another school said they like me. I do not intend to criticize those who use this as a power-play or even a self-esteem boost. I just feel I have better ways to use my time, like pursuing the things I value, rather than playing games at work.

Increasing my status. Related to the previous point, I never set out to land at the "best" (i.e., highest ranking based on some convoluted way of placing schools in a hierarchy) school. I don't want others to give a damn about me because I'm at Harvard or Wisconsin or UT Austin. I prefer to be recognized on my own merits, for the specific kind of work I do. At conferences, when eyes gloss over "University of Richm..." on my name tag, and then dart to find another, more worthy person to talk to, they've saved me 15 minutes of meaningless conversation. I've always been skeptical of [academic fame](#) because it seems we go out of our way to make ourselves feel important because, at some level, we realize we're not seen as important in the rest of the world. Being a "somebody" to other (elitist) academics seems at odds with making a recognizable contribution to the community. With few exceptions, the more popular you are among academics, I assume the less you and your work matter to the world outside of the academy; the more involved you are in your community, the less other status-obsessed academics care about you.

Closing Thoughts

"Okay, so you're not leaving," you might say. "Why write a blog post about it," you might even be asking. My intention here is to highlight the unspoken (though sometimes explicitly stated) expectation that, on top of trying to earn tenure at one institution, junior professors should also be looking to start a "better" (i.e., higher-status) job. The question, "are you on the market," doesn't come from prior knowledge that I'm unhappy, that the job is a bad fit for me, or that I or my partner need to move. It doesn't suggest that applying for a better job is the only way to get promoted because I'm already working my butt off to get promoted in my current position; leaving could actually set me back and introduce new challenges. Rather, at the root of it, the question just reflects pressure to advance one's professional status (even if it's at odds with your personal needs).

In the spirit of promoting self-care in academia, I ask that others rethink this mindset of going after "better" jobs purely to advance your status. Specifically, I mean not relying heavily on your institution to signal your worth to other academics. You can do so by publishing another great article, or winning a teaching award, or being awarded a fancy grant, or putting research into action (either in the classroom or in the community), etc. I think a healthier approach is to 1) think long-term to advance professionally and 2) place

your professional status in the broader context of your life. On point number two, I worry, for example, about those who neglect their health or continue to be single and miserable as they jump to a better job; I doubt there is any direct (positive) relationship between the status of one's institution and one's own happiness/health/self-esteem/purpose. But, I'm aware this all depends on your values and goals, particularly as it relates to your career. I just don't see the point of being at an Ivy, for example, if I don't have a community, am miserably single, in therapy, and am far away from family; the status alone isn't enough to sustain me.

I can't help but think about a romantic relationship as a parallel here in my suggestion to consider staying — or, at least consider not automatically leaving when the getting isn't necessarily good. If we constantly look for a “better” romantic partner, then we are taking energy and investment away from our current relationship. We're not fully committed, and thus our partner may not fully commit to us because they can sense we've got our eye on the door. (I know this from a past failed relationship, unfortunately.)

I should note that I'm not naive enough to ask that others commit to a department or institution while they are on the tenure-track; don't commit to an institution that hasn't fully committed to you (yet). But, by hiring you, they've made some level of a commitment; your colleagues are “dating” you and, in places that aren't sink-or-swim or practice academic hazing, they actually hope dating becomes marriage for life. You can, however, make a commitment to make your job more satisfying for yourself. To the extent that you can without jeopardizing tenure, take on fun projects, teach fun classes (or at least a few lectures within a class), make at least one friend on campus (there are faculty in other departments and, gasp, there are staff members, too!), or volunteer for a community organization. Outside of work, join a club, take a class, make an effort to find community, get an account with MeetUp/OkCupid/Tinder (whatever other apps kids are using these days), go to a community event, etc. Even if you one day leave, at least you'll have made an effort to make your present situation harder to leave without saying goodbye or shedding a few tears.

Additional Resources

If you are considering going back on the job market, or at least open to the possibility, check out what others have had to say about it.

- “[How To Apply for Your Second Job](#)” by Karen Kelsky of The Professor Is In
- “[Switching Institutions? Here's What Your Progress Toward Tenure is Worth](#)” by Karen Kelsky (The Professor Is In) on Chronicle Vitae
- “[How to Hop From One Tenure-Track Job to Another](#)” by Karen Kelsky (The Professor Is In) on Chronicle Vitae
- “[Should You Switch Tenure Tracks?](#)” by David D. Perlmutter on Chronicle of Higher Education
- “[Faculty Movers](#)” by Female Science Professor (summary: moving jobs is controversial)
- “[Academic Shopping Around](#)” by Female Science Professor

[“Starting over on the tenure-track”](#) by sciwo on Tenure, She Wrote
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