

Managing Your Career: The Long View

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The purpose of this chapter is to ask you to expand your time horizon and to think about (if not actually plan for) many years into the future. If you are like most people finishing graduate school or a postdoctoral fellowship and taking a job in academia, you are in your late 20s or early 30s. Your most immediate concerns – finding a job, beginning a program of research, setting up a lab, teaching courses, thinking about the tenure process and on and on – are dealt with in other chapters of this book. Given these more immediate pressing concerns, why should you bother to think further than five years into the future, if that far? Why not stick to the more serious and immediate problems of today?

We believe that having you think about your career for the long haul can pay dividends on at least three fronts. First, and probably most importantly, you may better situate yourself to reach long-term research and/or teaching goals. Developing a research career entails both short-term goals, such as completing the next experiment (and writing the next paper), and long-term goals, such as building a programmatic series of contributions that build upon each other, and (with luck) influence the direction of the field. A similar argument can be made for planning in teaching. One needs to consider not only the current courses that one is teaching, but also what one might teach in the future and how such teaching may fit within the goals of your department and your own personal goals. Second, you may think about some career goals and options that you would not otherwise consider. For example, could you ever imagine yourself becoming chairperson or going into university administration, as a Dean or in some other capacity? If so, what should you do to prepare? Third, just thinking about the choices people make in academia may help you see the perspective of others with whom you will be

interacting. Even if you never aspire to be a dean, you might consider why someone else would want to occupy such a position. After all, some dean in the future will be critical in making tenure and promotion decisions about you.

Planning for the future is a dangerous business. Our advice is to plan out possible scenarios for the future, but do not necessarily become committed to any one of them. The reason is that long-term plans, even the most carefully laid out, rarely become reality. You might decide that your research will be on certain topics and only those. But then what happens when an exciting new opportunity comes along for collaboration, where you and your field of expertise would fit right in and make you a natural player? Suppose you prepare your courses and decide that it was so much work that you will teach these forever, or as long as your department lets you. If you make this decision, you might again miss out by not teaching some new course when your interests develop and change. So, make a plan, but don't be locked into it. Keep your eyes open to changing situations and opportunities and take advantage of them.

Thinking about the Future

If you are entering academia in your late 20s, and if you retire at around age 70, you would have about a 40-year academic career. How do you plan for 40 years? Our advice: make concrete plans for small chunks of time and more general plans for the more distant future. Books abound on long-range planning and how to do it for individuals and organizations. Our advice is to keep it simple. Some recommended planning exercises are so complex and unwieldy that you could spend all your time planning what you will do and not have time to accomplish the goals that you ultimately identify. We advise planning for chunks of time of varying length, revising your plans

over time, and keeping your goals to be achieved in the form of simple lists (rather than long documents telling yourself what you will do). Let's consider short-term, medium-term, and long-term planning.

Short-term planning. Many organized people keep lists of things that they need to do and consult them frequently. The list should be hierarchical. What do you absolutely have to do this week? Prepare 5 lectures, attend 2 committee meetings, go to the departmental colloquium (which we believe is a must), and so on. The things that must be done obviously must have priority. In fact, you might just put them on your schedule and not on your list of things to do. Then the "to do" list can be devoted to more discretionary time. You could put writing the article that you need to write on the list, completing the manuscript review, and so on. Some people make a daily list of this nature, others a weekly list. These are the short-term things you need to get done. However, off to the side of even your short-term list, in a slightly different category, you might keep projects that take longer than a day or even a week to complete, such as articles you need to submit, a grant proposal you need to write, and so on. This keeps you mindful that you cannot fill up your short-term lists with only the daily affairs of academia – teaching, talks, meetings, committees and so on. Yes, do all those things, as you must, but build time into your schedule for the other activities that make for success in the long run.

This brings us to time management in the short term. Given the work on circadian rhythms, it is clear that we do not function at the same level of energy, creativity, and productivity throughout the day or even the week. Allocate times accordingly. If writing is the most demanding task you engage in, set aside those times that are best for writing. For example, some people identify a specific set of hours (say 5

to 10 hours per week) during their most productive time to engage in writing. One of our most successful colleagues spends very early morning hours each day on theoretical analyses and developing experimental methods. Others isolate a day or two during the week to dedicate to their own research time. Some people find it useful to isolate themselves from outside distraction (possibly at a home office) during these dedicated times. Use other off-peak times to engage in less demanding but necessary tasks. Once you have built time for writing and research into your schedule, try to set it in stone and don't let anything except an emergency push it aside. We believe that identifying your best times for distinct activities and allocating them appropriately is a critical step in keeping on the most productive path.

We have covered short-term planning first, before we consider longer term planning, but really the process should be iterative. You may state lofty long-term goals as we suggest below, but unless your daily and weekly plan builds in time to accomplish those long-term goals, you won't achieve them. So make sure your daily and weekly schedules permit you to achieve these longer terms goals.

Medium-term goals. "Medium-term" can cover numerous time periods. We have found it useful to think of six-month chunks of time. One of us has a lab meeting twice a year in which each person in attendance says what major goals have been accomplished in the past six months and states their goals for the upcoming six months. A record is kept, so every six months the accomplishments for that period can be compared to the original goals. Success can be applauded and missed goals can be noted. Why didn't you meet your goal? What can you change so that more goals can be met in the future? How should you change your daily or weekly plan so that these medium-term goals

(submitting that grant proposal, writing that paper) can be accomplished? You might find this “six-month review” process useful for yourself, working alone, but do it honestly! It is probably easier if you and a close friend or colleague can get together and conduct the six-month review with each other, asking and answering the hard questions about unmet goals. In our experience, the process of explaining your past behavior and future goals to a public audience every six months is a good motivator. A lab group works well.

Because of the 9-month teaching schedule, another natural unit of planning is the summer. Here, people are often unrealistic regarding how much can be accomplished during a summer. Set reasonable goals, including vacation time, and stick to the schedule. Don't spread yourself too thin with too many goals over the summer. This can lead to the disappointment of not accomplishing any of them. Every academic we know has the experience of thinking that summer disappeared with amazing rapidity. At the beginning of the summer, it seems to stretch forever (in prospect) but then suddenly it is August or September and the new academic year has crashed into your plans. So, set goals for each month of the summer that are realistic and make sure to follow them as carefully as possible.

A year is another natural unit for planning, much as for making New Year's resolutions. Departments sometimes require individuals to specify goals and accomplishments on a yearly basis in annual reports. Unfortunately, goals and plans set for the year often meet the same fate as do New Year's resolutions – they are forgotten after a few weeks. That is why you need to make sure your longer-term goals (6-month or one-year) make it onto your daily and weekly lists of things you need to accomplish. Still, once a year (perhaps in August, before the new academic year begins), it is good to

consider the question: “What do I want to accomplish in the next year?” and make a concrete list of goals.

Long-range goals. This type of planning is even more difficult, but you should do it. The ideas you produce here may range beyond concrete behavioral objectives to the category of “dreams, hopes and aspirations.” Do you aspire to become a top researcher in your field? Do you hope to become an award-winning teacher? Would you hope to climb the administrative ladder, from Department Chair, to Dean, to Provost to President? Do you hope to become a journal editor? Could you imagine serving in an organization that needs academic expertise but that is basically outside academia (say, working as an officer in a foundation or a federal agency)? Do you want to write a textbook? Do you think you will ever voluntarily retire early from academia and do something else with your life? You cannot do everything in life, but must make choices. However, you need to consider the large range of options that are open to you within academia so you make informed choices and do not say, when you are 55, “Why didn’t I ever consider doing X when I was 35?”

These long-range goals answer the question of what you want to do with your academic life during your 40 or so (possible) years in the field. One exercise that is somewhat morbid is to write your own obituary as you would like it to appear after a long and full life. What would you like it to say? How would you like to be remembered? What matters most to you? People differ markedly on these dimensions, and one can achieve greatness in being a wonderful teacher, a great researcher, an outstanding mentor of graduate students, a terrific administrator, or a great writer of books. Of course, some individuals appear to be able to do it all, but many can obtain excellence only in a subset

of these skills. Often people take the approach of being good, but not excellent, in many dimensions instead of excelling in one at the cost of others. Look carefully at your skills and abilities, as well as what you really find rewarding, and choose accordingly. But keep in mind that you are making choices in whatever you do; by aiming at some goals, you are usually excluding others. Consider your full range of options and select wisely.

The foregoing remarks have been directed only at career paths. Of course, you will have many outside demands and interests, too. You should have separate goals and objectives there, too. You can be too focused on work. Many academics see their personal relationships fail when all their time and effort go into their careers. Workaholism seems at least as prevalent (and probably more prevalent) in academia as in other jobs in life, probably because “work” is ill-defined and there is always more reading to be done, more projects to work on, more writing to do. So “the job” can expand and take over one’s life. We strongly urge you to prevent this from happening. Build in time that is sacrosanct for your personal relationships, family, exercise and/or hobbies. Taking this time away from your academic work will probably help the quality of that work when you go back to it. Don’t let your academic job take over your life, so that you wind up living and sleeping in your office and lab. You presumably went into your chosen field because you are intensely interested in it, but don’t exclude all the other things in life. When the inevitable reverses come in certain aspects of your job, it is refreshing to have other sources of joy to which you can turn.

In the remainder of the chapter we consider possible career goals at various stages in your life. Our advice and thoughts reflect our own opinions and experiences and all may not agree with them.

Career Plans: Early Career

Most of this book is about how to manage your career early on, so we will be mercifully brief here and list items in bulleted format. Every point we make is considered elsewhere in this volume, sometimes in an entire chapter.

- If you are at a research institution, get your research going and publish papers, refereed journal articles. Remember, this is one of the primary criteria for earning tenure at most institutions. Don't publish, or attempt to publish, one-shot studies. That might build numbers, but careful, multi-study packages build reputations and careers.
- Teach courses your department needs and do it well. Teaching can consume your life, but don't let it. Be efficient in preparing your lectures. Early in your career, teach the same courses regularly to minimize new preparations (but keep working on the courses by improving them each time you teach). Keep your eyes open for excellent students who might want to do research with you. You will learn much from teaching, too, so the new information can feed into your research.
- Talk to people in your department about valued criteria. Often when we take our first job, or move to another university, we believe that the new department has the same values as at our previous position. This is not necessarily the case. It is useful to discuss such issues with other junior faculty, but we also recommend identifying a more senior faculty member within your department to help provide guidance, possibly as an academic mentor.
- Persevere! Academic life is full of reversals for everyone. Everyone has rejected papers, has some disgruntled students and has too much to do. Don't let it get you

down. Taking a “mental health” day by phoning in “sick” when you are overwhelmed is not a sin, but don’t overdo it. And never miss a class without having a good fill-in.

- Collaborate, but watch out. You can get sucked into collaborations that take an immense amount of time but don’t lead to publishable products or, if the project is published, you don’t get much credit. Watch out for colleagues to whom “collaboration” means “be my research assistant and carry out or oversee this project on which I’ll be first author.”
- Keep up with your field. Set aside time for reading journals. Skimming is a great skill. Use it to keep abreast of work that is in your general field, but not your own more narrow area. Try to consistently work through each of the abstracts in a few critical journals in your area.
- Go to national and specialty meetings, as you can afford, and attend many of the talks. Some academics believe that they can avoid such meetings and let their publications do the speaking for them. Meetings are a great place to meet individuals that may eventually be writing letters for promotion for you. Consider organizing a symposium in your area at a national meeting. This will provide a venue to interact with leaders in your area. Give talks so that individuals will be able to see your best work before it is published. However, be sure to give practice talks before taking the show on the road.
- Be willing to perform service both for your department or your field, especially if the service will not take too much time and/or will benefit you professionally. Most department chairs will protect you from committees, so when she or he does

ask you to do some (probably relatively minor) departmental chore, don't say you are too busy with your own work. Remember, the chair is giving up much more of her or his time to do "service" than you can imagine.

- When editors begin to find you and ask you to review papers, do so in a thorough but balanced manner. Don't look at every paper as hopelessly flawed and show the editor how smart you are by pointing out the flaws. Ask yourself: Is this an interesting paper that advances the field (despite whatever difficulties might be present)? No paper is perfect, even the best ones. Also, be prompt in reviewing. Establish a reputation as a good, reliable reviewer and you may find yourself asked to be on editorial boards.
- Learn to balance "yes" and "no" appropriately. As your career progresses you will be asked to take on more and more responsibilities. At first, it is easy to say "yes" but you need to insure that this will not pull too much time from other more central endeavors. Likewise, it is useful to look beyond one's laboratory and take on responsibilities that benefit the department and/or the field as a whole. Again, a respected senior mentor can be invaluable in providing advice here.

We could go on in this vein, but will desist. Just read the rest of this book to discover advice on what to do early in your career. Don't worry that not all the authors will agree in the advice they give. Consider their opinions and find your own way.

Career Plans: Mid-Career

Let's make the happy assumption that you are now 7 or so years out of graduate school, have done well, earned tenure and are facing the future. Tenure seemed like such a big hurdle. Now that you have it, the achievement may seem anticlimactic. After all,

you may get a bit of a bump in your salary, but not enough to change your lifestyle.

Everything else about academic life will stay the same except that you can put “Associate Professor” on your stationery and you may have to go to more committee meetings and be expected to contribute more to the life of your department and university. These sad facts can seem disappointing, but this is the time to look to the future. What do you want to do next?

Many people keep on much the same path, especially immediately after tenure. Old habits are hard to break. However, we believe that within a few years you should start considering other options than the “business as usual” model. In general, after tenure you may consider looking around and branching out, both in your research and in other activities.

Obviously, one of the most dramatic ways to branch out is to consider moving to a different institution. This can occur at any stage in one’s career, but we decided to target this topic here because one most likely has just received tenure and may be a marketable rising star in the field. There is little doubt that moving to a new university can be very energizing in one’s professional career. The colleagues at the new institution often appear better, and one loses the old entrenched ways of doing business at the home institution. The intellectual climate changes dramatically, and this in itself can be very invigorating. Everyone wants to be wanted, so being pursued by another university can be uplifting. Of course, caution is also necessary here. Sometimes people do not wish to actually leave their home university but believe that an outside offer can better their current situation (e.g., increased salary and/or research support). The danger here is that in some cases, the home university cannot match the external offer and so one is forced to

move to a less desirable place or forced to stay with a bit of egg on their face. The bottom line is that there is considerable energy expended by many parties when considering a move to another university, so it is important to insure upfront that a move is a real possibility before the process gets too far. One can easily lose a considerable amount of personal productivity and unintentionally upset many colleagues when engaged in protracted dances with other universities. However, when the move is indeed to a better situation, it can be very energizing.

Now, let us assume that you are staying put, and you are still ready for some change. Let us consider research first. To gain tenure you might have used the strategy of publishing many empirical papers on a limited range of topics – on what you know well. You have made a name for yourself, as academics often do, by research and writing on a relatively narrow subject area. After you have received tenure, step back and take a look at your research program. Does it represent learning more and more about less and less? If so, consider branching out into other arenas that you find interesting. Read in related areas. Or maybe you just heard a colloquium that piqued your interest in something that is relatively far afield. Read up on it. Talk to people in that research area. Maybe you will strike up an interesting collaboration by bringing your knowledge, skills and background to bear on a new subject area. Supervising an undergraduate honors thesis in a related area is also a good way to extend one's research perspective.

In addition, you might be due for a sabbatical, if your college or university permits them. If you can, attempt to go to an exciting university where your mental batteries might be recharged and where you might learn about exciting and different

areas. Consider learning a new set of methods or analytic procedures that you can use in your work. Having new colleagues with different programs of research can start you off on a new path. Sabbaticals should also provide you with the opportunity to finish writing projects in an uninterrupted manner. A different style of sabbatical is simply to stay at home and attempt to use the time to catch up on ongoing projects. This can also be productive, and when there are family considerations this may be the only option. However, with this approach one can often be sucked back into the everyday routines of the department. So, when possible, it is useful to take a sabbatical at another university.

Besides new research arenas, you might consider different academic activities, too. In the paragraphs below we consider various paths you might consider. Certainly not all these suggestions will fit everyone, but they at least bear consideration.

First, if you have been writing mostly empirical papers reporting experimental results, consider making other kinds of contributions. One is to write synthetic review papers, of the sort that might appear in the *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, or *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (among many other possibilities). These papers can represent major and highly cited contributions if they help to summarize and crystallize research in a particular field. The same can be said for theoretical papers of the type that appear in *Psychological Review* and other journals. Once you gain some status in your field, you might be asked to write chapters for edited volumes that can also serve the same purpose. However, the huge number of edited volumes in all fields of psychology means that any particular volume or chapter may receive few readers and little attention, so publishing these kinds of synthetic contributions in refereed journals is a much better career move. Still, publishing chapters

is often liberating, because the reviewing and editing are usually light and you are permitted to say what you want to say in the manner you want to say it, relative to the arduous process that most journal editors employ.

You may also consider writing a book, a scholarly monograph, about your chosen field. Relative to edited volumes, there are fewer scholarly monographs and they have the potential to make a greater contribution to the field. On a practical note, once you start thinking about being promoted from Associate to Full Professor, many departmental and university committees start to look for a “theoretical or synthetic contribution” of some kind to document your status in the field, in addition to a series of empirical papers. Major review papers, theory papers or a scholarly monograph will help to document your credentials on this front.

Suppose you have not established yourself as primarily a researcher, but rather as a very successful teacher, or possibly you are one of those individuals who is excellent at both. In either case, you might consider writing a textbook. If you teach the course, you are probably familiar with most of the books out there and you know their strengths and weaknesses. If you enjoy writing and others tell you that you are a good, clear writer, then you might consider writing a textbook. Writing a text might seem a daunting task to you, but don't be put off. After all, if you have taught the course for years and it's in a field you know, then writing a book about the topic should not necessarily overwhelm you. Textbook companies are always on the lookout for exciting new textbooks, and an outstanding textbook can set the standard for the field. Let us consider the pros and cons of writing textbooks in the next few paragraphs.

First, the positive features. If you write a textbook for a fairly general course, you might make a bit of money. These courses include Introductory Psychology, Research Methods, Statistics, and the big survey courses taught in every department – Abnormal, Developmental, Social, or Cognitive, among others. However, most beginning textbook writers should consider writing a more specialized text before striking out in the big markets. Write an Attitude Change textbook if that is your field and then, if that experience is a good one for you, consider writing a Social Psychology textbook at some later point. Unfortunately, the more specialized the text, the less the market and hence the less the money you may expect to make. Yet even in the textbook market for larger courses, do not expect to make what the publishers tell you that you *might* make. They are always overly optimistic. Another advantage of writing a text is that you master your field in a way that you would not do without writing the text. In order to understand a subject well enough to write about it, you have to read deeply and synthesize your knowledge. Writing a textbook (like teaching a course) is a wonderful (and broadening) learning experience. In addition, your greater knowledge can produce a positive feedback loop to aid your own research, which may become better informed. In addition, writing a text that is widely used enhances your reputation in the field, as well as your name recognition.

There can be several downsides to textbook writing, too. For one thing, it is very time consuming. Editors of the publishing companies often sign professors to write texts with the mantra that “You have taught the course for years and you know the textbooks out there. All you have to do is write up your lecture notes.” However, it is never that easy. It is one thing to know enough about a subject to give a lecture to undergraduates

who know much less; it is an entirely different matter to write intelligently about a subject on which one is not well read where you will be judged by your peers at other universities. You simply must do your homework and immerse yourself in the field, at least to the extent of reading review papers about the topics on which you write. Another downside is that textbook writing is often underappreciated in universities, somewhat surprisingly. The attitude seems to be that scholarly monographs are to be taken seriously at the time of promotion and tenure, but that authoring textbooks represents “writing to make money.” Universities are increasingly emphasizing teaching, so this attitude towards writing texts may change. After all, a brilliant teacher on one campus can still only influence students there, but a brilliant textbook writer can educate a generation of students around the world who would learn from the text. Textbook writing is certainly not for everyone, but if you are a good, clear writer and find that writing comes easily to you, you might consider writing a textbook.

Another direction that often affords itself during the mid career period is becoming involved in national organizations, such as the American Psychological Association or the American Psychological Society, or more specialized organizations such as the Society for Research in Child Development or the Psychonomic Society. These organizations obviously do not run themselves, but are dependent upon the contributions from people dedicated towards forwarding the goals of the discipline. Consider volunteering for some committee work or running for an elected position. Being involved in national organizations provides an excellent perspective on the diversity of the field and how large-scale organizations operate. These organizations also afford the opportunity to get to know the leaders in the field.

As a final suggestion, what about administration? Are you good working with people? Does your department call on you to chair committees because you are perceived as a leader and are known to be fair and to get things done efficiently and well? These kinds of talents are not necessarily plentiful in academia. In fact, some people seem to choose academia because they are quite bright and love ideas and research, but don't have the practical or social intelligence to make it in highly collaborative, "real world" environments. Academia still tolerates and sometimes encourages the lone scholar residing in the ivory tower, as well as the "difficult" personality. Because academia almost always chooses its leaders from within academia, the pickings are sometimes slim. For someone to become a department chair, dean, provost or president means that the person is taking on a position for which he or she was not trained. These individuals have had to learn on the job. You might be one of these people who would find administration rewarding.

During your early mid-career period, you would probably be asked only to chair committees, but see if you like the experience of leading, of getting things done, of working with people. If you like them, you might consider administration at some later point in your career. The first step would be to be chair or head of a department. Of course, you don't choose this – your department and your dean do. Appearing "too interested" in being chair can, somewhat curiously, sometimes be the kiss of death in the selection process. Your department may see you as power hungry. Again, ask your colleagues about your potential administrative skills. You may be surprised to hear their response. However, because many departments have a system of rotating chairs – one

person does it for 3-4 years, then another, and so on – many members of the department will be chair or head at one point or another.

Very few people will go on in administration beyond the level of chair, but we hope some readers at least will consider this step. Of course, being chosen as a dean or provost or president of a university (among other posts) depends on being selected by outside search committees. But, why, you might wonder, would anyone want to take this step, which would remove the scholar from his or her chosen field and from teaching and research? This is a difficult question and depends on individual choices. However, every university needs outstanding academic leaders in these important posts. It is important for psychology (as a discipline) to produce academic leaders. At this writing, Richard Atkinson (a cognitive psychologist) is Chancellor of the entire University of California system of higher education, Judith Rodin (a social psychologist) is President of the University of Pennsylvania, William Gordon (whose field is animal learning and conditioning) is President of the University of New Mexico, and Nancy Cantor (a social/personality psychologist) is Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These are only a few of the psychologists who hold important posts. Many others are provosts and deans. Each of them chose to give up outstanding careers in academic psychology to serve universities in these important posts. Members of their universities and psychologists at large should be grateful to them for serving in these capacities. Administration can be quite rewarding, as one helps to move a department, a division or an entire university forward, but the jobs are demanding and provide their fair share of tough decisions and migraine headaches.

The mid-career period can represent a time in which you become immersed more deeply in your research and other scholarly activities, but as we have tried to indicate here, we hope you will also consider it a time to look up from your work and to consider branching out. Academia offers a fair range of opportunities within its walls.

Late-Career Directions

What constitutes the “late-career” phase of a career, when there is no longer a mandatory retirement age in academia in the United States? (Other countries still have it. In Canada university professors are forced to retire at 65). There is no fixed answer to this question, but because most people continue to retire around 65 to 70, we can consider “late-career” as beginning at perhaps 55. By this time, one’s career path is usually relatively entrenched, although people can show dramatic shifts of interest even at this point. We have emphasized continual self-assessment, but around age 55 or 60 is another point to step back and to take a hard look at yourself. Are you still enjoying what you are doing? If so, great; look to the future and examine opportunities as they arise. But if you are burning out, if you feel you can’t bear to look at another new group of undergraduate faces and try to educate them about your field, if you are tired of research – then it may be time to reassess your options.

If you decide you no longer want to teach, don’t simply hang on and teach with increasingly less effort and enthusiasm. Take the leap and get out of academia and let the younger generation take over. It is too costly to have students lose interest because of poor teaching. If you still enjoy your research, you might be able to become a research professor and support yourself. Some professors who have tired of teaching have officially “retired” and supported themselves from their retirement plan while still

maintaining their laboratories. Others obtain external funding to support their research. However, some universities cannot afford to continue to allow retired faculty members to continue to use their lab space, so this solution may not be an option. The point is that if teaching and academia no longer continue to excite you, our advice is to find something else for your abilities and not to stagnate on the job. You don't want to be considered "dead wood."

There are other options for older faculty. We have already discussed departmental and university administration. "Reinventing" yourself by finding an exciting new direction and purpose to your research is always possible at this age. We have observed that many older scholars become more interested in the history of psychology in general and of their field in particular. Consider stepping back and writing an overview history of your field, tracing the fate of certain ideas and movements through the years. (The older you get, the more of the history you have actually lived through). Another extremely useful function for wise senior faculty is in mentoring junior faculty. In this way you can repay the department for the mentoring that you probably received (or you could give others the kind of mentoring you wish you had received). Every department needs a core group of experienced faculty on whom the junior faculty can depend for advice.

Many psychologists remain highly productive and make important contributions in research, in teaching and in service until late in their careers. There is no reason not to expect the same for yourself, if you put your mind to it. However, if you do find your enthusiasm ebbing, look around for a new direction and a new job.

Retirement: Planning the End Game

The concept of retirement arouses very different emotions in academics. In some fields, people look forward to the time when they can retire and often take “early retirement” so that they “can do things they really want to do.” Our observation is that relatively few active academics feel this way. They are already doing what they really want to do – that is why they chose their field and their profession. So, retirement can seem a depressing or even dangerous concept: “If I retire I’ll no longer be able to do what I want to do.”

In the United States there is no mandatory retirement for college professors, as we have noted. However, there still appear to be informal expectations that one “should” retire at around 65 to 70, certainly no later than 75. If you don’t, you might be considered a workaholic and if not that, you would be perceived as blocking a job from some exciting young person just getting out of graduate school. However, there are many strategies for staying active past age 70 and “successful aging” is the watchword in the 21st century. Many academics who retire continue to be productive and can make important contributions. Some move to a retirement location near a university, where they may still have an adjunct appointment and do occasional teaching. Others continue writing and reviewing and may collaborate with younger scholars. Writing books or review articles, or editing books, can also be useful. Many individuals make good use of the wisdom acquired during the previous 40 plus years, such as serving in posts in national organizations (the American Psychological Society or the American Psychological Association).

One strategy for easing into retirement is the “phased retirement.” You may go to half-time teaching for a few years before you retire, at reduced salary. This frees part of your time to look in other directions for new avenues. Some people find that they can even get more scholarly work done when their teaching load becomes lighter.

Another option, and often an admirable one, is to retire and not look back. You may have spent your 30- to 40-some years in academia. Now you will move on to some other phase of life and leave your old way of life behind, maybe just dipping into a journal once a year to see if there is anything breathtakingly new in your field.

Issues surrounding retirement, perhaps even more than other topics covered in this chapter, are highly personal and no general rules will fit all cases. Each person must find his or her own way through these end-of-career issues.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the long view of academic life. The main message is that there is life after tenure and it should be lived to the fullest, but that the elements that constitute a full life will differ dramatically among individuals. Continue to assess your skills, your goals, and your situation to find your way through the variety of choices (inside and outside academia) that are open to you.