Essay on how faculty members can chart a meaningful post-tenure career

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on June 25, 2012 - 3:00am

Recent news documenting the unhappy state of associate professors [1] was unsurprising to me. I travel to different campuses every week and one of the most frequent requests I receive is to help "stuck" associate professors find their mid-career mojo. And there's nothing quite like walking into a room full of frustrated associate professors who have been invited to a workshop on moving forward at mid-career. The level of misery, rage, frustration and exhaustion is so close to the surface that it's palpable.

It's clear that mid-career presents its own set of unique challenges. Having worked with many mid-career faculty members, I'm offering this column series for those of you who are afraid you may get stuck, know you're stuck right now, or have been stuck so long you no longer remember what unstuck looks like. While professors get stuck for a whole lot of different reasons, it's clear that name-calling, shaming, and labeling are not helpful in getting anyone unstuck. So let's lift the judgment and instead acknowledge that it's normal to get stuck at different points in our career.

The trick is to figure out why and start moving toward a better place. Over the next six weeks, I would like to walk through a process whereby those who are stuck can identify how you got there, where exactly you are stuck, map out some strategies to get unstuck, build a support network for moving forward, and consider an exit strategy (if applicable).

So let's get started with the obvious question: Why are people at mid-career miserable? According to the COACHE survey, associate professors are dissatisfied with support for interdisciplinary scholarship, mentoring, travel funding, and time available for research. I also think that there's a deeper shift that occurs for faculty members once they get tenure that many either don't realize, or fail to respond to in proactive ways. Specifically, when faculty members are on the tenure track, there is a clear and time-limited goal: get promoted with tenure. That goal has externally imposed criteria that constrain and drive individual behavior.

But once that goal is met, the situation flips upside down from one of maximum external constraint to

one of unprecedented choice. I'm not suggesting tenured professors have absolute freedom, but relative to other professions, they have unparalleled autonomy and choices about their future direction. I've observed a broad array of post-tenure pathways, including institutional change agent, public intellectual, administration, disciplinary star, master teacher, and investing energy elsewhere. Some of these paths lead expeditiously to full professor while others can take a faculty member astray from the activities that are rewarded with promotion.

The problem for many post-tenure faculty is that they have grown so accustomed to being in a position of external constraint from the tenure track that when they pass into the next stage of their careers (one in which the primary benefit is the ability to choose), they struggle in choosing a path.

Why? Because they: a) don't know what they want, b) have been working so hard for so long they forgot what they love, or c) are genuinely interested in so many different things that they don't know what to do first. No matter what the reason is, the outcome is the same: if you don't choose a clear a path and focus your best energy in that direction, you get pulled in many different directions at once in support of other people's agendas. And whenever your energy is spread out in lots of different directions, it's difficult to achieve excellence in any one area. What I often hear mid-career faculty describe is a situation of working many hours over many years, but when they pause to reflect, it's difficult to say what has actually been accomplished.

The first step in moving forward at mid-career is understanding and acknowledging that the game has changed from the time you were pre-tenure in all the external ways described by respondents in the COACHE survey AND at a much deeper level. In other words, the internal dynamics have become fully inverted. So much so that the challenge is no longer meeting externally imposed standards, but instead clarifying who you are as a professor, what you want from your work, and where you want to be five years from today. Let me suggest a few questions that may help you as a starting point:

Who Are Your Role Models?

I define role models as people who are working in the academy in a way that you aspire to work. That means different things to different people, but what matters is that you can pinpoint specific people who have (or are doing) something you want to emulate. Maybe you can name them immediately, or maybe it will take you a while to think it through. Either way, identifying role models forces you to flesh out criteria and an image of what it would look like to thrive in the academy. This is particularly helpful for people are interested in so many things that they struggle to choose. Connecting with your role models will likely clarify what choices they made at your career stage and

how they made those critically important decisions.

What Do You Love?

For those of you who are stuck because you're so numb, exhausted, or used to putting everyone else's needs above your own, try taking some time to reflect on (and remember) what you love. Sometimes people talk about trying to find their "purpose" as if it's some lofty mystical quest that you are put on earth to complete. But I tend to believe that purpose is really just about finding the most efficient way to deliver what you are best designed to do. And the surest way of figuring that out is to focus on what you love as an indicator.

What Is Your Body Telling You?

If you want to go to a quick source of information, I recommend listening to your body! Our bodies are amazingly accurate barometers that constantly provide us with data about how near (or far) we are to meaningful work. For example, every time I attend a meeting I feel sleepy, cranky, and like I want to escape as soon as possible. As you can imagine, when I held an administrative position in my department, I felt sleepy, cranky and restless a lot because I spent most of my time in meetings. In contrast, when I'm teaching, I'm energized and fully engaged, and I often lose track of time. Guess what? My body is pointing me toward the path that will lead me to work at my highest potential. It doesn't mean I never have to sit in meetings (I do), but I've chosen to pursue a post-tenure path that maximizes the time I spend doing energy-generating activities and minimizes the time I spend doing energy-draining activities.

What if You Had a Magic Wand?

If you're having difficulty choosing a path because you're yearning for change, but feel overwhelmed by the vast array of things needing to be fixed in your midst, this question may be particularly helpful. Instead of making a list of everything that is broken in your world, and all of the complex, structural reasons these things are seemingly unfixable, imagine for a moment that you had a magic wand. If you could wave that magic wand and make one change in the world, what would occur? The answer to that simple question will often point you in the direction of the change you truly want to work toward.

These questions are a first step towards getting unstuck. I hope it's clear that each of these questions is designed to help you change the conversation from what you don't want to what you DO want. And more importantly, each of them will give you some measure of clarity about which post-tenure pathway you want to pursue in over the next five years.

This week's challenge:

1) If you're stuck, release yourself from any negative emotions, judgment and/or shame about it. None of that will change what's in the past and none of it is helpful in moving forward.

2) Start a journal or create a file and label it "mid-career mojo." Let it be a place where you give yourself permission to explore different paths, write about the questions posed here, entertain new possibilities, and/or collect items that inspire and direct you.

3) Spend 15 minutes journaling about where you want to be 5 years from today. Write about it in the

present tense and write about it in as much detail as you can imagine. Remember, this is about what you actually want, not what you don't want.

4) If you're drawing a blank, just observe the data that your body is providing when you're in different work situations. Notice when you feel energized and lose track of time, and when you feel drained and like time is standing still.

I hope this week brings you freedom from any judgment about being "stuck," clarity about what you want in the next five years, and the courage to imagine yourself truly thriving.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

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Links:
[1] http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/04/associate-professors-less-satisfied-those-other-ranks-survey-finds

Essay on how mid-career academics can find their place on emotional spectrum

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on July 2, 2012 - 3:00am
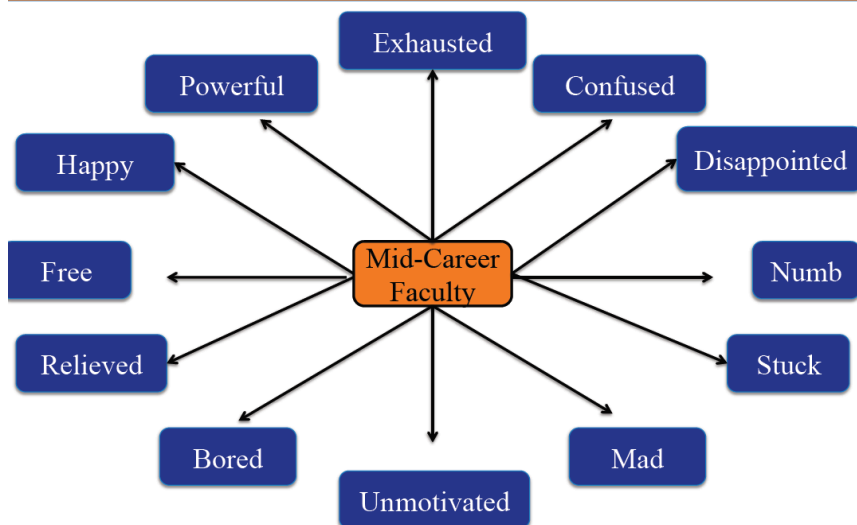
Last week I started this column series with a discussion of how and why people get stuck at mid-career. [1] Consistent with my experience on campuses, talking about mid-career faculty who are "stuck" in a normative way elicits three types of intense responses. The first is from people who are not stuck and who feel compelled to shame and belittle their colleagues who are stuck (with particular venom aimed at those who have been stuck over a long period of time). The second type of responses comes from people who are stuck and thankful that someone is giving voice to the experience. And finally, there are faculty members who are high-functioning on the surface, but withering underneath. For them, the mere idea of getting un-stuck feels like a life preserver.

In fact, anytime we start talking about a pervasive reality that is not openly discussed, it's common for intense emotional responses to arise. Each of these responses reify my belief that it's perfectly normal to get stuck at mid-career and that we need to differentiate between people and processes of professional development. Some people know how to get unstuck quickly, while others struggle to adjust their approach, learn new skills, and develop the networks that will lead to the post-tenure pathway [1] they truly desire. And most importantly, judging, shaming, and attempts at characterizing people as irreparably damaged "dead wood" are completely ineffective in getting anyone unstuck and work instead towards diminishing the conversations.

Where Are You on the Mid-Career Emotional Spectrum?

If you're currently in the feeling "stuck" category, you made some great strides last week by clarifying where you want to be in five years and identifying the corresponding post-tenure pathway. [1] The next step is to move a little deeper into the emotional undercurrent of why you are stuck. I describe this as the mid-career emotional spectrum because most post-tenure faculty can locate their feelings within this range. I'm going to describe each position on the spectrum briefly to help you pinpoint your location so that you can identify what emotional work you may need to do to move forward.

Mid-Career Emotional Spectrum

Exhausted
Powerful
Confused
Happy
Disappointed
Free
Mid-Career Faculty
Numb
Relieved
Stuck
Bored
Mad
Unmotivated

1) Exhausted: Post-tenure faculty members often describe feeling physically, emotionally and relationally bone-weary. They have been stretched so thin by service and institutional maintenance that their work-life feels like a constant sprint from one mind-numbing meeting to another.

2) Confused: Choosing a path for the next chapter of your career can elicit feelings of confusion about what to put on the front burner and what to leave on the back burner. This confusion can stem from a sense of wanting to do lots of different things or it can stem from a lack of interest in much of anything.

3) Disappointed: I often hear people describe moments of looking around and thinking, "Is this it?" Having worked so hard to win tenure, some faculty experience intense disappointment when faced with the reality that they are now committed to colleagues they find unstimulating, living in a geographic location that is suboptimal, and/or feeling they have few meaningful relationships outside of work because of how much they have sacrificed to win tenure.

4) Numb: On the tenure track, many faculty mask their emotions so as to be professional and to be sure they don't make enemies among those who will be voting on their case. However, masking one's emotions over a period of time and stuffing down intense emotional responses can result in feeling numb, perpetually flat affect, and an inability to connect to emotions.

5) Trapped: This feeling comes from the market reality that it's harder to move from one institution to another post-tenure than it is pre-tenure. Even beyond the academic labor market, some faculty describe themselves as feeling "trapped" when they are no longer interested in research but don't believe they have any marketable skills outside of the academy. In this context, the perception of a limited marketability combined with the security of a guaranteed salary and benefits for the duration of their professional career binds some faculty to a space and position they feel unable to leave.

6) Mad: During the tenure-track years, some faculty members endure a variety of hazing-like experiences. For those who have been beaten down over a period of six years, some issues and

incidents remain unresolved or unexpressed and result in a constant simmering rage that is carried around on a daily basis and can erupt with the slightest provocation. For others, anger stems from structural pressures like budget cuts that result in constantly increasing workloads and fewer resources. Anger can also be related to devaluation. It's only after being promoted with tenure that some professors realize the disconnect between their own personal values and the values of their college or university. Because post-tenure faculty members engage in different types of service, they are often brought into close contact with the stark distinction between the story of what is valued by their institution and the reality of what is valued (evidenced by resource distribution). When faculty members sense that work in a particular area is neither rewarded, nor recognized as valuable by the institution, a certain level of inertia and disengagement can set in.

7) Unmotivated: During the pre-tenure years, fear of failure (not getting promoted with tenure) is a powerful motivator. For some faculty members, once the absence of fear, as well as intense, time-limited pressures to perform are gone, their motivation is significantly diminished and a new source of motivation must be located.

8) Bored: This feeling is primarily voiced around teaching and repetitive service responsibilities. For example, teaching introductory-level courses may be stimulating the first few times, but the 30th time around feels significantly less so.

9) Relieved: Winning tenure is an enormous accomplishment and one that has taken six years of hard work. The sense of relief stems from an alleviation of the pressures generated by the tenure track (not knowing if you can put down roots in a location, not knowing if you will be successful, etc.). This emotion is frequently asserted by those who have recently been awarded tenure and promotion and often short-lived.

10) Free: This particular emotion can take a few different forms. One is from a sense of intellectual freedom where scholars who may have taken a strategic approach to their work in the pre-tenure years feel the freedom to engage in more ambitious projects post-tenure. Additionally, some mid-career faculty members describe feeling free in terms of their voice and feeling that they no longer need to filter or modulate their opinions (as they did when they were on probation). And finally, some describe a deep sense of freedom based on not having to worry about their financial and professional future in ways that will allow them to focus entirely on their scholarship and teaching.

11) Happy: This emotion is experienced by people who feel they are doing exactly what they want to do and who have organized their post-tenure life to maximize the time they spend on activities that energize them and minimize the activities that are energy draining.

12) Powerful: I hear this from faculty who describe knowing how to work the systems, opportunities, and networks on their campus to get things done. They feel clear in their agenda, know how to move it forward, feel comfortable saying no, and skilled in blocking competing agendas from advancing.

Can you locate yourself on the mid-career emotional spectrum? I hope so, because understanding where you currently reside on this spectrum is useful in moving forward. To state the obvious, if you're primarily located in any of the positive emotions (powerful, free, happy) then you're probably not stuck and/or reading this column for advice. You may want to sharpen your skills in time management and saying "no," but moving toward where you want to be in five years is mostly about gaining skills, trying new strategies, and expanding your network.

Letting Go and Moving Forward

What's interesting is that the majority of positions on the mid-career emotional spectrum are negative and debilitating. If you locate yourself in any of these negative states, I want to suggest a few ideas to free yourself up in order to move forward.

1. Differentiate between the things that are (and are not) under your control.

I'm describing the causes of so many of these negative emotions in detail because most of them: a) are outside of your control and b) have nothing to do with where you want to be in five years. People get angry with me when I say this, but it's true. The structural pressures aren't likely to change in the short term (and may actually get worse). If you're committed to the path of being an institutional change agent as your primary activity, then organize on! But if you want to work toward becoming a full professor, breaking new ground in your discipline, or launching a new research area, working to change things beyond your control and/or staying in a state of perpetual anger and frustration over them, is not going to move you toward your goals. Focusing on your writing and becoming more productive (both of which are under your control) will move you closer to where you want to be in five years.

2. Think about what you need to do to release the negative emotions that are tied to individuals.

I know it's hard, but moving out of these negative emotions involves resolving your feelings, conflicts, and relationships with others in your environment. In most cases, this is going to involve some combination of a literal release of the negative emotions from your body and some form of forgiveness. Let's face it, negative feelings (particularly when stuffed down over a period of time) get embedded in your body and won't just go away. The more we try to push them down, the more they take root, grow, deepen and expand until you are walking around so bitter that you snap at every perceived slight, become known for disproportionate responses to conflict, and/or are perceived as "checked out" because you're so emotionally locked down that you can't engage. Whatever you need to do (kickboxing, hot yoga, a good cry, short-term therapy, journaling, etc.) to get that hurt out of your body so you're no longer carrying it around is well worth the investment.

3. Get clear about what success means to you.

One of my mentors once told me: "The only real tenure in the world is to do what you love. Everything else is an illusion." What I think he meant was that job security in a position where you experience negative emotions most of the time is not particularly desirable. So instead of internalizing what your institution defines as successful, measuring yourself by that standard, and/or being angry about how opportunities and resources are distributed, try considering what success means to you? What does it look like (by your definition) to live a successful life? And once you've imagined your own standard, see how that cognitive reframing changes how you perceive your current situation.

The Weekly Challenge

This week I challenge you to:

1. Locate yourself on the mid-career emotional spectrum.

2. Ask yourself whether your current location on that spectrum is likely to move you forward on your mid-career path or if it's keeping you stuck where you are.

3. Take a deep breath, close your eyes, and ask yourself: What would it take for me to release myself from this emotion and move forward?

4. Try some form of emotional release to move whatever negative energy that you're carrying in your body out of you and make the space for some healing. This will be most effective if you try something you've never done before.

5. Take 15 minutes to journal about what it means to you to live a successful life. If your version of success is perfectly aligned with your institution, great! If it's not, take some additional time to consider what it means to thrive in a context where your values differ from institutional values and what type of support would be necessary to support you.

I hope this week brings you clarity about what emotions may be underneath your sense of being stuck, the willingness to do the work that's necessary to release yourself from them, and the empowerment that comes from living out of your own version of success.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

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Links:
[1] http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/06/25/essay-how-faculty-members-can-chart-meaningful-post-tenure-career

Essay on mid-career productivity issues

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on July 9, 2012 - 3:00am

I love all the messages I'm getting from those of you following along on the process of finding your mid-career mojo, especially those of you who are newly naming your current state as "stuck "and determined to get "unstuck" this summer. Having identified the common challenges [1] and emotional blocks [2] faculty experience at mid-career, I want to spend the remainder of this series sharing with you the concrete strategies I've seen mid-career faculty use to get themselves back on track and moving down their self-defined post-tenure pathway. [1] Specifically, we'll talk about jump-starting your writing productivity this week, then move into building new mentoring networks, saying "no" and considering an exit strategy over the next few weeks.

While not all of the post-tenure pathways are paved with writing, the majority of them are. For that reason, one of the quickest and best ways to jump-start your productivity after a period of dormancy is to actually start writing again. That may sound painfully obvious, but the majority of people I work with who are stuck haven't written in a very long time, feel a profound sense of guilt and shame about it, and can't imagine how to move back into research productivity amidst their busy schedules. There really is one clear way back into productivity: start writing again. Not just writing once in a while when you're inspired, but really working towards the development of a consistent and sustainable daily writing habit. And if you told yourself in the past that you "only had to write to get tenure," it may be time to move beyond that limiting belief, re-engage your intellectual life, and step into being the senior researcher and scholar that you aspired to become when you started graduate school.

We know from faculty development research that daily writing leads to greater productivity, lowers anxiety, and serves as the well from which new ideas constantly spring forward. But beyond those benefits, I am a proponent of daily writing because it helps to realign each day with your long-term goals by connecting you to what you love. I run a large national center that serves over 6,000 faculty members, I manage a 13-person staff, and I travel almost every week to a different campus to give workshops. But guess what? No matter how busy I am, every morning starts with my "power hour" of writing. Not because I love writing (I don't), but because it's the one thing that concretely moves me toward my long-term goal each day. Daily writing changes the way I think and behave for the rest of the day. And doing it first thing in the morning means that no matter how far the rest of the day goes

off the rails, the truly important work moved forward.

In order to actually engage in daily writing, you'll have to let go of three pervasive myths that academic writers cling to: 1) you need big blocks of uninterrupted time, 2) you need to feel inspired before you can write, and 3) writing is what happens when you're done thinking. I'm calling these myths because none of them are supported by research on writing. But even more importantly, I want to challenge you to simply try daily writing for two weeks to see how much you can accomplish in 30-60 minutes per day, what happens when you sit down and write (irrespective of your mood), and how writing occurs through every stage of the research process.

12 Steps to Establish a Daily Writing Practice

Let me offer the following 12 steps as guidelines for you to experiment with daily writing.

Step 1: Clarify your writing goals.

Figure out what writing tasks you want to accomplish at the <u>beginning of the week</u> [3] and block them out as specific times and dates in your calendar. Keep in mind that there are two different kinds of energy at work in getting things done: 1) figuring out what you need to do, and 2) actually doing it. If you have to stop and figure out what you need to write at the beginning of your writing time, it may keep you from doing it.

Step 2: Create accountability.

While daily writing is important, accountability is the magic ingredient that will help you to get it done each day and maintain the habit. There's <u>plenty of ways to create accountability</u> [4] for your writing including <u>professional nags,</u> [5] writing buddies, <u>online writing communities,</u> [6] and <u>coaches.</u> [7] You can write with someone in the same physical space, on Skype, or via chat. Or you can write along and just connect before and after your writing time (by phone, text, or e-mail). It doesn't really matter how or who, but you should pick whatever mechanism is going to inspire you and make sure that you get the work done.

Step 3: Start each day by with a pause.

Taking a deep breath and a momentary pause to clarify what really matters is a great way to start your day and your writing time. It's so easy for the daily chaos and electronic distractions to set the tone for our day and lead us to stay locked into a mode of reacting to others. The pause is a time to remind yourself of your post-tenure path and elevate the truly important work that is quietly waiting for your attention (your writing) above the seemingly urgent barrage of requests coming at you.

Step 4: Get your butt in your chair.

This is the most important aspect of developing a daily writing practice: show up and do the work. You must literally get your butt in your chair in front of your computer and keep it there for the duration of your writing time. Treat this time with the same respect you would a meeting with a colleague: show up on time, start on time and end on time.

Step 5: Set a timer.

Timers are wonderful because they keep us on task when we're trying to establish a new habit. When you first start a daily writing habit, you may consider this unnecessary or beneath you. Try it anyway. One of the biggest mistakes that writers make is grossly underestimating the amount of time that writing tasks take, so a timer is useful in learning how to accurately estimate routine and repetitive writing and research tasks.

Step 6: Manage your resistance.

It's perfectly normal that as soon as you sit down to write you will feel a burning desire to do anything but write. You'll want to check e-mail, find the right music, read something before getting started, log on to Facebook to let everyone know you are writing, knock a few quick tasks off your to-do list so you can be fully present, get a snack, fold laundry, or do ANYTHING other than start writing. This is just a wave of resistance and it will pass. The quickest way around it is to tell yourself that you're only going to write for 5 minutes. That's all. Then you can do those other things. Once you go for 5 minutes, you'll be settled in and all of those other burning desires will settle down.

Step 7: Stop when the timer goes off.

People often get excited when they start writing again, but do stop when the timer goes off. You can leave yourself a note about where to start the next day, but don't just keep going. Why? Because we're trying to break the binge-and-bust cycle and the only way to do it is to write in consistent, small, daily increments (think marathon, not sprint). In other words, if you overextend yourself one day, you'll be that much less likely to pick back up the next.

Step 8: Track your writing.

Find a way to log your writing time on a daily basis. There are plenty of ways to do this through online communities and various apps. I find the simpler the better when you're getting started. The idea is to see your efforts add up and truly feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of the week (instead of the perpetual sense of frustration that occurs when we keep putting the writing off).

Step 9: Give yourself a treat.

Every day you write is a day to celebrate! A treat is whatever brings pleasure into your life. It doesn't have to cost any money or take a lot of time; it's just a way to acknowledge that you deserve some pleasure every single day.

Step 10: Review your progress on Friday.

At the end of the week, take a look at how much you accomplished and how long the various writing tasks are actually taking you to complete. Raising your awareness about the connection between time and work will help you to avoid making promises you can't keep, setting yourself up for conflict in collaborative work, and will help you to get much better at saying "no" to requests that take time away from your writing.

Step 11: Assess and adjust as necessary.

When establishing a daily writing practice, you want to take a perspective of compassionate curiosity towards your work. In other words, be gentle with yourself when you don't meet the unrealistic goals

you set the first week. And be curious about the difference between how long we imagine it takes to complete writing tasks and the reality of completing them. In that spirit, assess your work and adjust accordingly.

Step 12: Take the weekend off.

Did I forget to mention that the best part about daily writing is taking the weekend off, free of guilt and thoughts of what you should be doing? Your brain needs rest, sleep, and leisure for optimum performance so this part is mandatory! But it will also become easier and easier once you begin to experience the regular forward progress and productivity that results.

The Weekly Challenge:

Now that you've identified your post-tenure pathway and cleared away the emotional blockages, it's time to:

- Carve out your daily "power hour."
- Use it to establish a daily writing practice.
- Find an accountability partner or mechanism that will help keep you moving forward.
- If you feel overwhelmed by the idea of reconnecting with your writing and/or genuinely have no energy available to set up tracking and accountability, join us for a free 14-day summer writing challenge [8] (you write and we provide the support, accountability, and online tracking software).
- View your experiment with daily writing from a perspective of compassionate curiosity and see where it takes you.

If your post-tenure pathway requires you to move from minimal to a much higher level of productivity in your writing, acquisition of external funding, and/or publication record, then developing a daily writing habit is an ideal first step.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

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[7] http://www.facultydiversity.org/?resources
[8] http://www.facultydiversity.org/events/event_details.asp?id=244934

Essay on how mid-career faculty members can rebrand themselves

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on July 16, 2012 - 3:00am

Because I spend lots of time on different college campuses, I get a chance to meet many mid-career faculty members. A few months ago I met an associate professor whom I'll call Joan. After a little chit-chat, she told me that she felt "stuck" in a very particular way. Not having a clear post-tenure pathway [1] meant that she found herself responding to other people's needs, accepting a disproportionate amount of departmental and institutional service (with the best of intentions), becoming chair of her department (because nobody else would do it), and every year getting further off the track to promotion to full professor.

Despite all of the service she's provided at her university, Joan feels devalued and disrespected by her colleagues because she hasn't published anything in years, she's grossly underpaid relative to her colleagues, and she feels unable to leave. She described herself as being "typecast" as the person in the department who takes care of everyone else's needs, picks up the balls other people drop, and does the invisible and unrewarded labor that keeps everything running. While it was clear that Joan would benefit from clarifying her post-tenure pathway, resolving where she's located on the mid-career emotional spectrum, [2] and jump-starting her research productivity, [3] she also needed to find a way to create a new professional identity.

There are a lot of Joans out there who feel stuck in this particular way. They've been cast in a role that's led to an institutional story about them that doesn't feel like it fits. But they've been doing the same thing (in her case, various types of institutional service) for so long that their scholarly and professional networks have shrunk down to those on their own campus. And while that network may be highly functional for getting bureaucratic tasks completed, it's not helpful for moving into new and different types of activities. So when a shift is desired, it can leave people like Joan feeling as if they don't know where to begin because everyone in their social environment knows (and responds to) them in a habituated ways.

Whenever you're feeling stuck in a way that is tied to your professional self (i.e., people in your organization have cast you in a particular role that no longer fits), you have to recognize that

changing perceptions is a process that starts with you reimagining yourself, engaging in new relationships and behavior, connecting to new networks, and taking courageous steps in new directions. What Joan really wanted was to reinvent her professional self. She no longer wanted to be the person whom people go to when they need time-consuming and unrewarded labor done. In fact, the servant role was starting to feel like a prison and she was becoming increasingly angry and resentful because she fell into it, instead of consciously and intentionally choosing it. Joan was clear that in five years she wanted to be a productive researcher (albeit in a different way than in her pre-tenure years), promoted to full professor and receiving equitable pay. In short, she was ready to step out of the servant role and step into the scholar role. And while it it's clear that this type of change doesn't happen overnight, it is possible.

I believe reimagining our professional self requires a sense of internal clarity and it requires us to cultivate a whole new set of networks, mentors, sponsors, and collaborators. And it often requires that we reach outside of our campus environment and begin constructing those new relationships in ways that support the emerging professional self that we want to create. This may involve some experimentation at first, but we're far more likely to have that new self supported outside of our institutional context than within it where the story about us can feel locked into place. Let me suggest a few steps you can take toward building the kinds of relationships that will support you as you step toward a new professional identity:

Step 1: Map Your Mentoring Network

Start by taking five minutes to map out your current mentoring network. I have argued in a previous column that what we generally refer to as mentoring can be broken down into <u>nine specific components:</u> [3] professional development, emotional support, intellectual community (people who can read and comment on work in progress), role models, safe space, accountability, access to opportunities, sponsorship, and substantive feedback. The key for mid-career faculty is to differentiate between the mentoring network that has supported the role you are trying to shed and the kind of mentoring network that would support the role you want to step into. While it's effective to think about this in your head, it's even better to actually write it out (feel free to download a <u>Mentoring Map</u> [3] to help you do so).

2. Identify your current needs

When you take a look at the mentoring network that would support the professional identity you want to grow into, what does it look like? Is it full or is it empty? Are there lots of different people, fulfilling lots of different needs? Or do you have a handful of names that appear over and over again? Circle anywhere you find holes on the map. Those are the areas where you want to increase capacity and they are a place to start building a network to support the new you.

3. Ask: How can I get my needs met?

This is the fun part. Pick one of the areas where your mentoring network is thin and spend five minutes brainstorming all the possible ways that you can get your needs met. For example, Joan could only name one person with whom she felt comfortable sharing drafts of her writing. But after a few minutes of brainstorming she came up with five different ways to increase the pool of readers for her writing.

4. Plan to maximize your opportunities

Once you've got your brain generating possibilities, try expanding it a bit further by focusing on the opportunities that are right in front of you. What could you do at your next conference to get your needs met? Who do you know who already has what you want (and may be able to give you excellent advice on how to get it)? Who has expressed an interest in your work or your career who could be helpful in moving you forward? Even more important, what are specific actions you could take to start those relationships? Joan has a conference coming up in her research field so she decided to contact several people to set up coffee meetings, ask her professional organization's mentoring program for a mid-career mentor, and become newly assertive when meeting people who are interested in her work by asking if they would like to read a draft.

5. Identify your limiting beliefs

People are often quite good at brainstorming ideas to get their needs met and maximize their opportunities. But at some point in the process, they realize that they actually could take some of these steps. And as soon as that happens, their limiting beliefs start to surface. Here's a few examples:

Who am I to contact _____?
My work isn't ready to show anyone/good enough.
I may be rejected/embarrassed/humiliated.
Nobody has ever helped me in the past, so why would anyone help me now?
I'm deadwood and everyone know it. Nobody is going to take me seriously.
I'm afraid of _____.

I'm referring to these as "limiting beliefs" because they limit behavior and the ability to build a new mentoring network. The great news is that they are just beliefs so they can be replaced by more helpful and productive ways of thinking.

6. Commit to ACTION

No matter what, commit to taking three concrete actions that will help you move toward expanding your network today. For Joan it involved sending three e-mails to set up those conference dates, making a call to inquire about a mid-career mentor, and downloading an iPhone app that captures business cards and puts them in her contacts. Three simple steps that set new energy and momentum into action.

The Weekly Challenge:

1. Ask yourself: Do I feel locked into an institutional role that no longer fits?

2. If the answer is yes, try spending a few minutes mapping your network, identifying your needs, brainstorming ways to fill the holes, planning to maximize your existing opportunities, identifying your limiting beliefs and committing to a three new actions.

3. If it's difficult to do this alone, try asking a friend to brainstorm with you.

4. If you find yourself wanting a change, but resistant to taking action, gently ask yourself, why?

5. If nothing else, try writing every day for 30-60 minutes each day this week. The mere act of changing your behavior and the daily practice may just unearth some unexpected surprises.

I hope this week brings you the strength to face any role you no longer want to play, the courage to begin reimagining your professional self, and the clarity to take the first few steps in that new direction.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

Source URL: https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/07/16/essay-how-mid-career-faculty-members-can-rebrand-themselves?width=775&height=500&iframe=true

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[1] http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/06/25/essay-how-faculty-members-can-chart-meaningful-post-tenure-career
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[3] http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/07/09/essay-mid-career-productivity-issues

Essay on the need for mid-career faculty members to turn down service requests

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on July 23, 2012 - 3:00am

Last year, sociologists tested the hypothesis that women do more service than their male counterparts at mid-career [1] and found significant gender gaps in both service work (women do more of it) and advancement to full professor (men are more likely to advance). While working the same number of total hours, men spent seven hours more per week on research than women, who were investing that time in service and mentoring. I often work with mid-career faculty members (mostly women) who are overwhelmed with service requests, overfunctioning on departmental service, and feeling exhausted, angry and resentful [2] about the work. And yet, when asked why they keep doing more service, I hear the same thing repeatedly: "I can't say no."

Given the twin realities that mid-career women (especially the "nice" and "helpful" ones) get more service requests than their male counterparts and that too many yeses suck time away from the very activities that lead down the path to promotion [3], it seems to me that one of the most critical skills for success at mid-career is ability to say "no" clearly and confidently and to remove the phrase "I can't say no" from your professional vocabulary.

What Keeps You From Saying No?

If you're someone who is overfunctioning on service to the detriment of your post-tenure pathway [3], don't worry! There's no shame in acknowledging it and moving toward an exploration of why that is your reality. In other words, if you know you should say "no" and you need to say "no" more often, then the most important question is what's keeping you from uttering the magic word?

I've observed three types of factors that keep mid-career faculty (especially women) from saying "no" more often, more confidently, and more strategically then is necessary to pursue their post-tenure path [3]: 1) Technical Errors, 2) Psychological Blocks and 3) External Realities

Technical Errors

Sometimes mid-career faculty have a vague sense that they should say "no" more often and that their

physical and emotional exhaustion can be traced directly to service overload. They are not however, putting any conscious effort into actually saying "no." This can be due to a variety of technical errors including:

1. You don't literally know how to say "no" in a manner appropriate to the context
2. "Yes" is your default response (and you feel must have an extraordinary reason to say "no")
3. You have no idea how much time "yes" takes
4. You haven't recognized the connection between the time required to fulfill "yes" commitments and the time you feel you're missing for truly important activities
5. You don't have a clear and consistent filter to help you decide when to say "yes" and when to say "no"

The great thing about technical errors is that they are easy to fix! If you don't know how to say "no," then practice (here are <u>7 Simple Ways to Say No</u> [4]). If "yes" is your unconscious default response, try making "no" your default response for a while and see what happens. If you don't know how much time a "yes" takes, start tracking how long each and every "yes" costs you. As soon as you start realizing that "yes" is a commitment to a unit of your most precious commodity (time), you'll get much more selective about how, when and to whom you give it away. If you aren't clear about the linear connection between the time you're giving away and the time you don't have for truly important activities, start holding a <u>Sunday Meeting</u> [5] each week. And if you don't have a clear filter to decide between "yes" and "no," either develop one or create a human filter (i.e., a service mentor, a buddy or an accountability group) to help you while you are building this muscle.

Psychological Blocks

Fixing the basic technical errors will be helpful, but more often than not the reason you're saying "yes" too often is that that there's a little something deeper going on and it requires a different process than a tip or trick. The goal of identifying psychological blocks is to become aware of why you feel compelled to say "yes" so often and then experiment with different beliefs and behaviors in your decision making. The most common psychological blocks to saying "no" I see among mid-career faculty are:

1. You're a pleaser (you're more concerned about people liking you than you are about meeting your own goals).
2. You're trying to be super-professor (trying to do a little of everything but not doing any one thing well).
3. You're a <u>perfectionist.</u> [6]
4. You feel overly responsible for things that aren't entirely your responsibility.
5. You believe everything will fall apart unless you do the work.
6. You're overcompensating and/or trying to prove you belong.
7. You always put other people's needs before your own.

Unlike technical errors, psychological blocks are not immediately fixable with a new skill. Instead, resolving them requires an ongoing process where you first and foremost become aware of how you feel when you receive a request. And until you can gain in-the-moment clarity about what to say "yes" and "no" to, don't respond on the spot. Once you have some time, ask yourself why your first impulse is to say "yes." Once you can identify how you're feeling and if any of the common blocks are occurring, check in with a buddy, mentor or support system to discuss the costs and benefits of saying "yes" or "no" to a particular request. This process will help you to experiment with saying "no" more often, develop a clear and consistent filter for your decision-making, and lead to a more

equitable and balanced service load.

External Constraints

You can do all the inner work possible and yet sometimes circumstances outside of your control force you into a situation where your "yes" is a suboptimal but necessary response. For example, someone died and you're the only person with substantive expertise who can step in and teach their graduate seminar halfway through the term. This happens to everyone at some point if you have a long academic career, so negotiate the best possible circumstances for your "yes," get the support you will need to make the "yes" a realistic possibility, and lean into your network. It's also critically important to adjust your expectations about what's possible during those times in order to be focused on moving your agenda forward.

Weekly Challenge

I know this is a delicate topic, but this week I challenge every mid-career reader who is feeling "stuck" to:

1. Reflect on your past academic year and gently ask yourself: Do I have a problem with "yes"?

2. If you determine that you are overfunctioning relative to your colleagues, take 10 minutes to identify what keeps you from saying "no" more often.

3. If it's a combination of factors, pick one step you can take to move forward this week to set yourself up for the rapidly approaching fall term.

4. Write every day for 30-60 minutes. It's the very best insulation you can provide yourself for the unexpected moments of external constraint.

I hope this week brings you the desire to explore your habits around saying "yes" and the willingness to take the first step in a new direction.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

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[3] http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/06/25/essay-how-faculty-members-can-chart-meaningful-post-tenure-career
[4] http://zenhabits.net/say-no/
[5] http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/surviving/fall2
[6] http://celestinechua.com/blog/10-ways-to-tell-if-you-are-a-perfectionist/

Essay on choices for faculty members who consider leaving academe

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquemore on July 30, 2012 - 3:00am

We've covered a lot of ground in the mid-career mojo column including: how to plan your post-tenure pathway, [1] how to move beyond the common emotional blocks [2] faculty members experience at mid-career, how to jump-start your research productivity, [3] how to imagine a new professional identity [4] and construct a mentoring network to support it, and how to say "no." [5] Since we've come this far, I would be remiss if I didn't tackle the ultimate academic mid-career taboo: consciously choosing to leave a tenured professorship.

This is a subject that is near and dear to my heart because two years ago I left my tenured position to become an entrepreneur. I left because I was no longer interested in generating research, I was bored in the classroom, and the work I love and cared about (teaching faculty members and others how to advance their careers) wasn't labor that was rewarded at my institution. So I left to found the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity, and now I get to do what I love as my job. When I tell this to people, they invariably describe my decision to leave as "courageous" or "brave" and I constantly receive requests from people wanting to know how I "escaped the academy."

Honestly, it was neither "brave" nor an "escape," it was simply a choice I made. And because I've helped many people think through the process and find the exit door since my own departure, I would like to demystify the process for anyone who has ever contemplated leaving the ivory tower after receiving tenure.

Step 1: Differentiate Resistance From Reality

The most important place to start is from a position of clarity about why you want to leave. Are your recurring thoughts of leaving a form of writing resistance [6] or are they a manifestation of your genuine desire to make a career change? It's critical to start here because sometimes when we aren't clear about what we want, or we aren't committed (in an explicit way) to the academic path, it's easy to start imagining greener pastures. For example, when you're in the midst of trying to finish a difficult writing project, pausing to indulge in extended fantasies about what else you might do (or

may have done) with your professional life is probably more about resistance than reality.

However, if you find yourself miserable on a daily basis, spending most of your work time on tasks you don't enjoy, and/or are experiencing prolonged stress-related illness that's tied to your work, thoughts of leaving are more likely to be flares emanating from your higher self. The key here is to determine whether your thoughts about leaving are really a form of writing resistance (your bodyguard creating escapist fodder to keep you from getting your writing done) or if it's a stronger and deeper message from the pit of your gut that it's time to make a change.

Step 2: Get Clear About How and Why You Became a Professor

If you suspect that your urge to leave is more than just momentary resistance, then the first step forward is to step back. What I mean by that is before you move too deeply into any exploration of future alternatives, it helps to pause and take a few moments to remember how you got to your current position. I recommend taking 15 minutes to journal about two important questions:

1) How and why did I become a professor?

2) Do I really want to do this? Why or why not?

There's something about writing out your story that reminds you about what attracted you to the academic path, returns you to the energy of hope, and gets you even further in tune with the factors driving your thinking about staying or leaving. When I did this exercise, I realized that my path to the professoriate was driven by my desire to teach college students, and it reminded me how much I loved that activity for over a decade. But it also reminded me that research always felt like the tax I paid to teach and that if I no longer enjoyed classroom teaching, it was time to move on and make space for someone else.

Step 3: Plug Into Networks of Possibility

If you're still moving forward to explore alternatives, this is the point when you will want to connect to new networks to do so. The mistake that people commonly make is to initiate exploratory discussion of leaving the academy with other academics. It's a mistake for two reasons. The first is that there are deeply rooted belief systems in place that enable so many brilliant people to work so hard, for so little money relative to their level of education ("This is the best job in the world," "Everyone wants the freedom we have," "Nobody ever leaves," "We can't do anything else," etc.). The mere idea that you would choose to leave after tenure threatens the validity of that belief system and you are likely to get barraged by defensive responses. For example, when I gently started to hint that I might leave, I was told all of the following by my colleagues:

- "This is a biggest mistake you'll ever make."
- "You'll have zero credibility once you're no longer a professor."
- "You'll never be able to make your business work. Do you know how many businesses fail?"
- "I've invested in your career and you owe me, you can't leave."
- "There's a reason that nobody leaves: everybody wants what we have."
- "Are you aware of the fact we're in a recession?"
- "I wouldn't do that because you'll never be able to come back."

I know it's hard, but the second reason it's so important to connect to nonacademic networks at this

point is that when you're in the early phases of exploration, the last thing you need is guilt, shame, fear, threats, and/or negativity energy. The larger lesson here is that if you're considering leaving, stop talking to people who have not done what you want to do and start talking to the people who have: entrepreneurs, visionaries, change agents, community activists, artists, healers, nonacademic intellectuals, writers, organizers, politicians, etc. By doing so, you'll start to realize two things pretty quickly: 1) There is a whole world out there of people who have Ph.D.s and aren't professors by choice, and 2) Outside the academy, it's normal to change professions, start over, and reinvent your career multiple times.

Step 4: Experiment and Analyze

The two biggest things that keep people from change are over-thinking and under-doing. So instead of imagining your exploration as one where you have to make some big dramatic change in one fell swoop, why not just come up with some ideas and playfully experiment with them (and I mean actually doing them)? In my own exit process I attended circus school and divinity school and the school of hard knocks (community organizing). Guess what? I failed at all of them! That's great data (those are three things I can check off my list of possible future directions). None of these experiences were wasted time because they each forced me to step outside my comfort zone and get publicly uncomfortable by letting go of having to be the "expert" and instead becoming a student, and they all helped me to hone in on my true gifts and talents. So stick your neck out a little bit and see what happens.

The goal of these experiments is not just to try new things, but to get closer and closer to understanding your core gifts and talents. Some experiments come with immediate external feedback (such as someone yelling "help her, Jesus!" in the middle of my sermon), but since you're trying out something new, it's most important to stay tuned in to your internal feedback: How do you feel when you're engaged in this activity, how is time flowing (fast or slow) and what is your level of pleasure and satisfaction when you're done? Each of these data points will start to move you in a particular direction and give you a sense of whether you should continue the experiment or shift gears.

Step 5: Ask the Big Question

At the end of my experimenting stage, I ended up where I started: I'm a teacher. It's not just what I do, it's who I am at the core of my being (even if what I love most is teaching those who are also teachers). And with that part resolved, it was time to turn to the big question: What really matters to me? I mean that in the deepest way possible: what's the change (or impact) I want to work toward in my lifetime? For me, I'm committed to working toward changing the culture and face of the academy so that it is inclusive, supportive, and diverse at the highest levels of power and decision-making. When I got clear about the answer to the big question, I realized that my institutional location was not the best vantage point to work from. The answer to this question is going to be different for me than it would be for a computer scientist leaving the academy to work at Google. But the point is to get honest with yourself about what really matters to YOU and then ask yourself if your current position provides you with the strongest platform.

Step 6: Find the Exit Door

Once you get clear about the direction, you're only left with questions of form and opportunity. Do you want to start something new or join something that already exists? Do you prefer the ethos of

nonprofits, for-profits, or government agencies? Do you know people who can help you to ferret out opportunities to either get a position you want or get your idea/organization/business/movement off the ground? This is the nuts-and-bolts phase, which can be exciting but also requires a tough combination of tenacity and patience.

Leaving a tenured professorship doesn't happen overnight. You'll need to plan an exit strategy that takes your commitments into consideration. If you have graduate students, you'll need to tend to their transition. If you have writing projects in play, you'll need to figure out how to wrap them up. There will be lots of decisions to make about all of the stuff that is tied up with your former identity of being a professor (e.g., what to do with your regalia, 15 years of teaching evaluations, and data you have laying around your office). And most importantly, you'll have to prepare to undergo a dramatic shift in your professional identity.

The most critical piece of your exit plan will be your support system and safe space. You will inevitably have moments when all the gloom and doom predicted about your departure will feel like they are manifesting, when momentary setbacks make you second guess your decision, and there will be days you know it would have been easier if you could just teach freshmen how to construct a valid survey question for the 50th time. But what I hear more often than not from people who have thoughtfully and consciously chosen to leave the academy in order to pursue their true purpose is, "Why did I wait so long?"

It's unfortunate that academic institutions don't have a culture that supports faculty who choose to leave when the job no longer fits. It seems to me that building a clear exit door from the ivory tower (as opposed to forcing people to dig their own escape tunnels) would be a powerful step in the direction of institutional transformation.

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore

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