Facing Those Moving Fears

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"Congratulations!" I said to a startled faculty member who was clearly nervous about telling me that she was considering an offer elsewhere. My congratulations, given to scores of high and low ranking departing faculty and staff over my many years in administrative posts, was usually followed by a confused smile, a sigh of relief, and a stuttered "I was so worried about telling you." I would tell the probably soon-departing person how favorably I felt about moving if deemed necessary or desirable, that it is pleasurable to be marketable, and that I hoped that he or she would relish the new opportunity that had been earned.

I know from personal experience, confirmed by a large number of articles about job hunting and academic search procedures, about the terror, personal and professional, that accompanies a job change. Fears of leaks about the search and telling your present colleagues and supervisors of your decision are among the most nerve-wracking of an already high anxiety experience.

Having served at five different universities since leaving graduate school, I developed a different attitude about departing faculty than most of my colleagues who appear to view a move as a betrayal bordering on abandonment and disloyalty. It is rare that I was happy as an administrator to have someone leave. In some cases it was more from dread of having to fill the position, but I never felt betrayed or sullen. After all, it is reasonable to assume that no one would undertake the time consuming and emotional task of looking for another job unless it was in their best interests.

I know that many people feel that they must have an offer in hand to get more money or better working conditions, but I consider that a byproduct of anti-moving sentiments. I much prefer the tack taken by a bright young scholar I had recruited who told me that if he did not get a substantial raise, he would look for another job. I always admired him for his courage and honesty because he was in fact highly marketable and he saved both of us a lot of sparring by setting the record straight (and he always earned good merit raises).

My general attitude on moving stems from an important piece of advice that I received from my graduate school mentor the day that I received my Ph.D. hood. I have passed it along to many students and young colleagues when I thought it suitable:

> Always make sure that your resume reflects constant and continuing achievement so that if the time comes for you to move—and it will come—you will be ready. It will come because no matter how wonderful a specific situation is, people change, people die, and people move, institutions and communities change, and you, your interests, and your own life may dramatically change. Should you decide to move and cannot, you will feel trapped. If you are fortunate, none of this will happen but don't count on it.

People in a free society change jobs all the time. In fact, it has become increasingly commonplace in the United States to change locations and careers many times. So why do we in academe face this with such trepidation? Personal experiences and a review of several columns from people concerned about searching for a new job reveals this composite of the horror of it all:

> How do I safely put out feelers to test my marketability? When do I tell my boss who is likely to be called? Am I being disloyal to this college which has treated me well? Am I deceiving my colleagues? How many people can safely know that I am searching? Who must I tell to avoid hard feelings? Who can I trust to serve as a reference and preserve confidentiality? If I do not get the job, will I forever be a lame duck? Will my credibility be lost if I am unsuccessful in my search? If I don't try now, will I be too old to move?

Each of these concerns is legitimate, realistic, and not limited to academe. My concern is that they need exist at all, especially among members of a profession that thrives on achievement, excellence, recognition, and upward mobility.

It may be that the gnashing of teeth in academe over mobility, especially among faculty, can be attributed in part to the tenure system. Many studies reveal that faculty members are happy with their choice of career but not with their career status in terms of visibility, options, or institutional prestige.

Only a few stars are marketable with tenure. As a consequence, the overwhelming number of tenured faculty are unable to move unless they are willing to forfeit their hard-earned security. This may explain the ill feeling and sense of betrayal frequently directed at those job seekers who have the clout or the courage to seek new environs. Is it possible that an end to the tenure system would likely result, not in feared indiscriminate firings, but rather in mass movements of faculty to more individually compatible positions?

One other option for mobility is into administration. But even then, few tenured faculty will move into an administrative post elsewhere without the guarantee of tenure. This means that you must satisfy the self-perception and requirements of the campus you seek to join regarding your eligibility for tenure should circumstances and time call for a return to faculty status. Mobility in administrative posts is indeed more commonplace but still calls for adding a good record of achievement to your resume when the time comes to move.

Can't we create an environment of respect for the natural desire for mobility that inheres in most of us? I am not suggesting that we all go on the market. I do suggest that we not make such a big deal about it if colleagues decide to venture forth in the very human search for just the right place at different stages of their lives.

Four realistic perceptions can guide you if wanderlust has taken hold. First, it is not treason to your school or to your colleagues for you to seek and consider a change that may be personally beneficial. In each of my own moves, I retain good friends and never lost my affection for or interest in the institutions I served. Good colleagues may be sorry to see you go but will be pleased for your good fortune.

Second, never apply for a position for which you are unlikely to be a serious candidate. The number of applications from desperate, hopeless, or unqualified candidates for any job is astonishing. Having the reputation as one constantly on the market is not good from any

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discernible standpoint. Know Thyself. Know Academe. Hearken to the advice of my mentor and keep yourself marketable.

Third, do not rely upon confidentiality. It does not exist in the relatively small universe in which each of us operates by discipline or position. Expect leaks. If you are on a short list, the word will be all over your campus and beyond. Good colleagues will respect and probably envy a close run even if you lose.

Fourth, moving involves important personal considerations and therefore should be undertaken only with an understanding of the pains and rewards. The combination of a fresh start and being a stranger in new environs is challenging. Your decision to make a change should be based on opportunities for personal and professional growth, not on real or imagined concerns about colleagues. Additionally, and this is not for everyone, I accept the notion that when offered a reasonably attractive opportunity I would rather regret saying yes than regret saying no.

Ellen Goodman, writing about what she called "graceful exits," noted that you can leave a place without denying its importance to your life and suggested that you should view change as moving on, not simply as moving out. It takes vision and courage, she concluded, to recognize when a job and/or a life stage are over.

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