

Approaching Your Career Transition with Clarity

by Deb Elbaum, MD, CPCC



Perhaps you are a recent graduate who is looking for his or her first full-time position. Or maybe you are a seasoned chemist who is facing another job transition. Either way, you might feel that you have little control over your situation. At some point during the process, you might experience self-doubt or feel that you are at the mercy of fate. But here's the truth: you have more choices and more control over the situation than you realize.

As you search for your next position, it is critical that you update and polish your resume, search on-line job postings and job boards, and network with colleagues and friends. Equally as important, though, is to take time to pause and reflect about the most important part of this process: you. Although your resume may get you in the door for an interview, ultimately it is you – and not your past accomplishments – who will be hired.

This is the time to gain clarity on what you really want, what your strengths are, and what choices you have in a situation that, at first glance, may seem out of your control. Focusing inward and connecting with your inner resources can not only help dispel feelings of self-doubt, but also help move you forward with purpose and confidence. As you clarify and practice talking about your strengths and passions, you will come across in interviews as more confident and excited about your work. More clearly defining the type of position you are seeking will give structured focus to your search and networking. You can start by considering the following questions:

What makes you unique? – Even if you hold the same degree from the same university as another candidate, your set of values and strengths is uniquely yours. You have your own work ethic and approach to science. Think about the work you've done over the years, whether at school or in your last position. How do you approach problems? What do you really enjoy doing? Where do you know you make a contribution? As you answer these, create a purpose statement about who you are. For example, you might be “the discoverer who tackles problems from a bold, new perspective,” or “the conscientious scientist who completes tasks efficiently to move

projects along.” Write your purpose statement down and post it where you will see it often, to remind you of your value.

What do you really want? – Get comfortable, relax, and let your imagination go. Let your mind take you to three years in the future. Imagine that you are at your ideal job. Where in the country or world are you working? What is the work environment like? What do you notice about your colleagues? What excites you about coming to work every day? The clearer you can imagine these things, the better. Now, focus your job search to seek out this vision. Reach out to those individuals and companies who are doing the work you want to be part of.

How can you challenge yourself in your job search? – If you’re like most applicants, you are connecting with people on LinkedIn, attending networking events, and handing out business cards. That’s great! And, yet, you can still challenge yourself. What is a bold step that you can take? Cold call a scientist you’ve long admired?

Commit to scheduling 20 informational interviews in one month? Form and lead a mastermind or accountability group?

What choices do you have? – Although you might not recognize it, the reality is that you have many choices each day, and many factors are in your control. Not only do you have control over whom you contact and which jobs you apply for, but you also have control over your attitude and how you “show up” to an interview. In other words, how do you present yourself when meeting others? How do you talk about yourself and share your accomplishments? Just to be clear, no one is advocating lying. But what you can and should do is bring the best version of yourself – and the leader within you – to an interview. Consciously choose the attributes you want to embody and manifest, such as confidence, curiosity, and a love of science.

Find these characteristics and strengths within yourself and bring them to your interview. Leave the self-criticism and self-doubt at home.

Lastly, don’t forget to treat yourself with kindness and compassion through this process. Smile at yourself in the mirror each morning. Each night, acknowledge and celebrate all of the steps – big and small – you took that day to move forward. Most importantly, remember that this situation is only temporary.

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