Never Let Your Job Get In The Way Of Your Career

Mid-Career Mentoring Session
Wednesday, May 9, 2001
AAM — St. Louis

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You are the CEO of your own life.

Permanent jobs are growing scarcer. Temporary, contract, term employment are more and more common. It is less and less likely you will have a career at one institution, but rather will piece together a career out of several jobs at several institutions.

Two important things to remember:

• The Museum was around long before you got here; it will be around long after you leave.
• Someone else did your job before you; someone else will do it once you’re gone.

So, as much as you love your institution, do not misplace your loyalty. Your first loyalty is to YOU.
The Resource Right Under Your Nose

Your current position! Take advantage of what’s around you. Network. Make friends in other departments. Have lunch with folks. Personal relationships will make your job easier, and will give you knowledge, and perhaps opportunity.

REMEMBER: Your current job is the springboard to your next job. This doesn’t mean you do a crappy job – far from it, you want to do as good a job as possible to impress at your next interview. But think: how will this job – this set of skills and responsibilities – look to the next employer? If it’s less than impressive, how can I change it?

Skill enhancement

- Workshops: offered at conferences, seminars, through SPCs
  hands-on, practical
- Conferences: big (AAM) more theoretical
  small (region, state, special-interest) often more practical
  attend sessions outside your specific area to gain broader knowledge
- “Buddy System” help out your friends around your institution
- Freelance / consulting to gain experience and exposure
- Volunteerism (ditto)

Resume enhancement – things that look good

- Organizations: shows interest, commitment to field
  get involved – leads to activity, responsibility, resume items
- Publications: shows that others respect you
  get started with special-interest journals, rather than shoot for the big, general publications
- Conferences: presentations also show you are respected
  regional / state conferences easier to get accepted
- Freelance: broaden your range of experience
  earn big cash money! (not)
“Branding”

Finding a niche – something a lot of people need, and you can do really well (Writing Whiz; NAGPRA Queen) – then market yourself around.

Beware of Typecasting

- Big museum / small museum. Both types feel employees of the other type can’t “cross over.” This is nonsense, but nevertheless prevalent. Try to work for both types early in your career. If it’s too late, you can always volunteer for the other type.
- “Branding” vs. “pigeon-holed.” If you specialize in one area, people will very quickly stop seeing you as able to do anything else. If that’s what you want, great. But if you want to do several things, make sure you get varied assignments. Volunteer or freelance at a reduced rate to get the experience. DON’T accept a lot of jobs that are “close enough,” or you’ll be typecast in those. (I personally have had to struggle to be seen as a developer, and not just “the label guy.”)
- Rising too far too fast. My friend David got an entry-level job at a small museum (staff of 4 or 5) right out of college. After 3 or 4 years, through attrition, he had become the senior staff member and was named Executive Director. After another 3 years, he felt he had learned all he could at such a small place, and started looking around. He couldn’t find anything. If he applied for another executive position, they told him he was too young and inexperienced. If he applied for something lower than executive, they said it would be a step down for him. He eventually made a lateral move into education.

Keep An Ear to the Ground

Stay up on the market. Not because you’re planning to abandon ship at any moment, but as a vital part of your research, your obligation to yourself. Know what’s out there, what skills are in demand.

Read ads outside your area. Museums sometimes look for Development Officers and new Directors when they are planning big changes.

- Read Aviso every month
- On-line services
  - www.aam-us.org
  - www.astc.org
  - www.globalmuseum.org
“What You Know” vs. “Who You Know”

BOTH are crucial:
- WHAT you know will get you the job
- WHO you know will get you the interview – so get out and network!

Portable benefits

GENE’S PET PEEVE: Benefits (salary, vacation, retirement plan, etc.) are often pegged to seniority – but project-based employment means you never become senior. Weigh the benefits you are offered carefully. (I was once offered a salary commensurate with my 12 years’ experience, but expected to take the same vacation package as someone fresh out of school.) If necessary, press them. EVERYTHING IS NEGOTIABLE. Be prepared to come up with creative solutions. (In the end, they raised their salary offer by two weeks’ pay, with the understanding I would take two weeks of unpaid leave every year.)

When is it time to leave?

Easy. When you’ve stopped growing. As we say up in Minnesota, “He not busy being born is busy dying.”

Now, “leave” can mean different things: leave the museum; leave the field entirely; transfer to another department; take another job within your department; keep your job but take on new tasks. You will have to weigh your situation, your opportunities and life-choices.

(Different institutions have different attitudes toward ex-employees. Some will welcome you back with open arms; others won’t give you the time of day. If you think you may want to return some day, consider that.)
How to Leave?

Attend tomorrow’s session on Professional Departures. (See? I told you conferences were useful!)

In general, burn no bridges. It’s a very small field. Any time you apply for a job, you can expect that a friend of a friend of your boss was once your co-worker. They WILL talk. This happens ALL the time.

What is the next logical step?

Depends where you want to go. When faced with a decision, make a list of a half-dozen factors that are important to YOU, and weigh your options. But remember: whatever decision your brain makes, your heart and gut will have to live with. If your gut is uncomfortable, there’s probably a reason. Find out what it is, and decide if it’s important. There’s nothing worse than waking up each morning to go to a job you hate.