

# Tips for Pursuing Postdoctoral Positions

Daniela Cimini

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# Why applying for a postdoctoral position

- ❖ Postdoctoral training is not expected in every field
- ❖ However, even a short postdoc (1-2 years) will help you become an independent scholar
- ❖ Postdoctoral training should be seen as a stepping stone to a long-term independent career



"Behind one door is tenure - behind the other is flipping burgers at McDonald's."

# Things to consider before applying for a postdoctoral position

- ❖ What is your ultimate career goal?
- ❖ Which place/group/lab has a history of “successful” postdocs?
- ❖ Which type of environment suits you best?



# How to apply for a postdoctoral position

- ❖ Do not look only for postdoctoral openings
- ❖ When you make the first contact, make sure to have a nicely prepared CV, a good cover letter, and names of three referees
- ❖ Make sure you have more than one option



# How to select the right offer

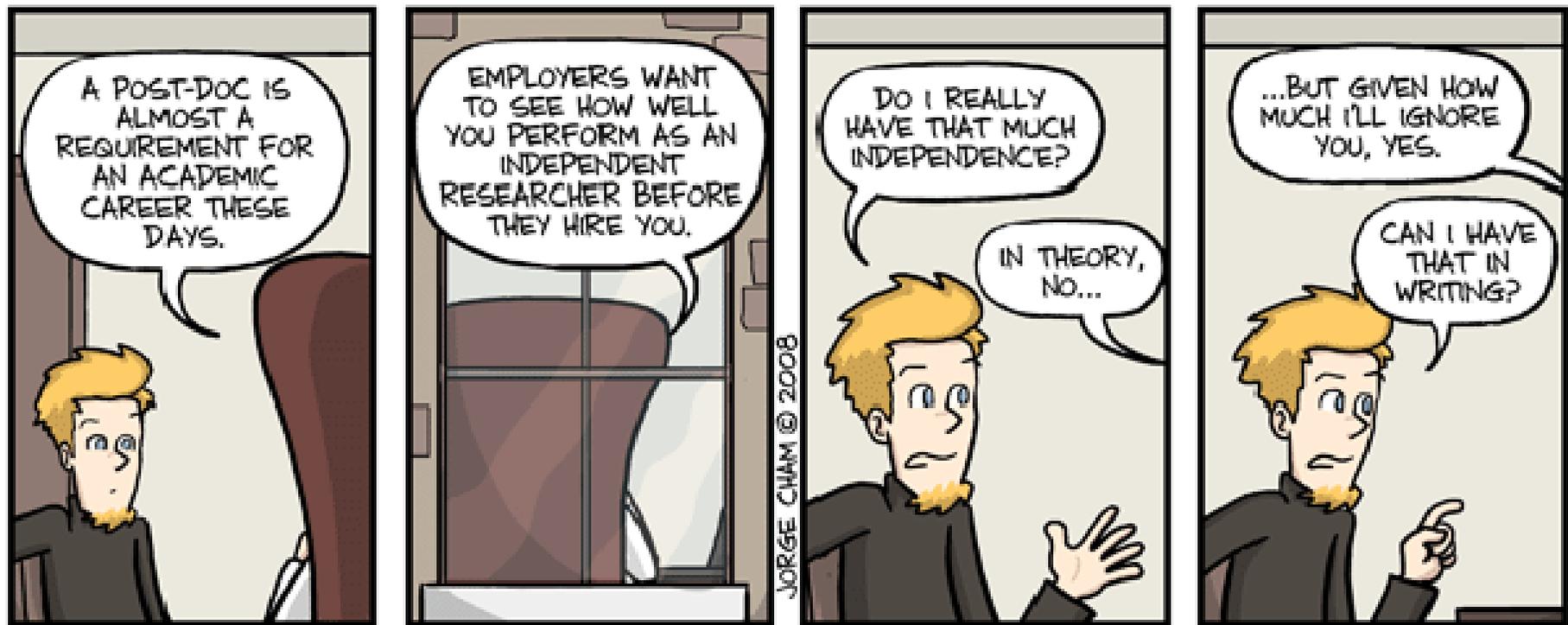
- ❖ Which lab/supervisor would help you achieve your career goals?
- ❖ Have previous postdocs from those research groups been successful?
- ❖ Are current group members happy/satisfied?



"Just so we're clear, the job comes with no benefits, no sick days and an embarrassingly low salary. Still interested?"

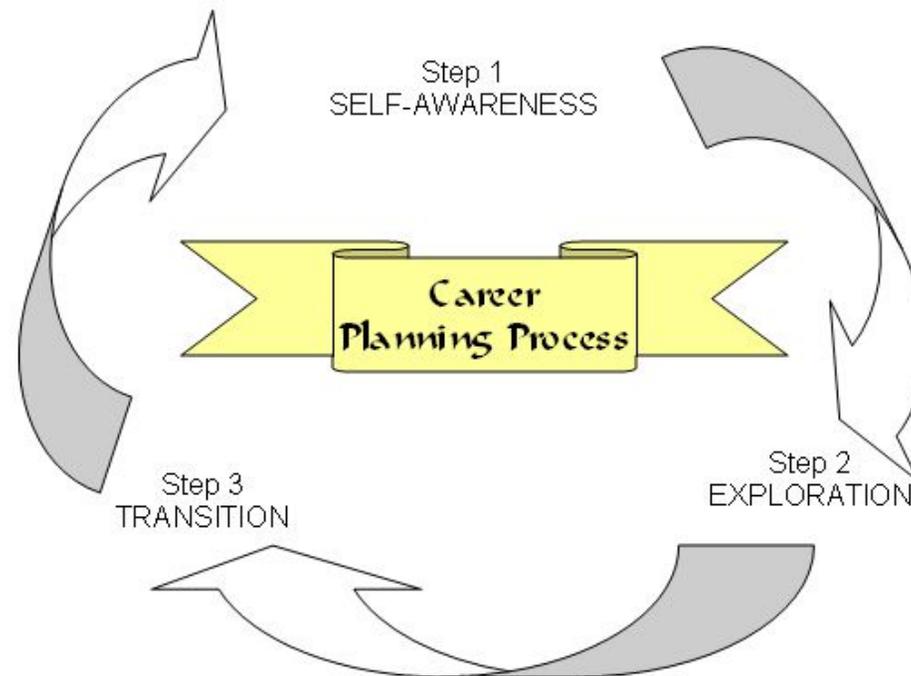
# What do you do once you are a postdoc?

- ❖ You will not have an advisory committee and you will be expected to be more independent. Embrace the challenge.



# Career goals

- ❖ What do you want to do after your postdoc?
- ❖ What do you need to accomplish to achieve your career goal?



# Research

- ❖ Set ambitious, but realistic goals
- ❖ Potential employers want to know that you can get things done
- ❖ If you do not publish during your postdoc, your career options will narrow down



# Writing

- ❖ At some point you will be expected to write up the results of your work
- ❖ Take the initiative and do not let your advisor do it for you (if you do not do it, you will never learn)
- ❖ If you are not a good writer, find ways to improve your writing skills
- ❖ Never let your results sit in a drawer and procrastinate, the chances are you will be scooped



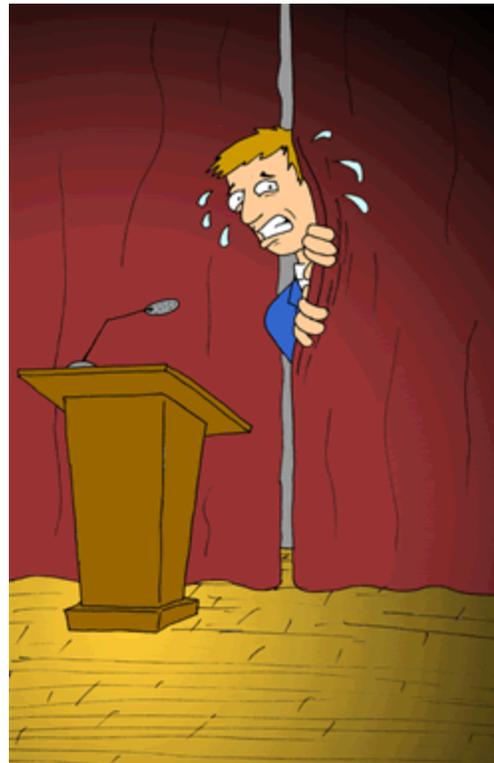
# Reading

- ❖ Keep up with the literature in your field
- ❖ When you read, pay also attention to writing styles



# Giving presentations

- ❖ Take any possible opportunity to present your research at departmental seminars, lab meetings, conferences, and other venues
- ❖ If you think you are not a good speaker, find ways to improve your skills (workshops, readings, colleagues' and mentor's advice)



# Networking

- ❖ Do not be shy and talk to people
- ❖ Make sure that you are recognized for and identified with the work (research) you are performing



# Attending seminars/classes/workshops

- ❖ Use this stage of your career to improve your skills
- ❖ Special seminars, classes, and workshops are normally offered by your institution, as well as at many national meetings



# Teaching and Mentoring

- ❖ If you plan to take a teaching position, make sure to practice
- ❖ Whatever job you will have in the future, it will most likely involve some kind of mentoring. Make sure you gain some experience in this sense (e.g., mentoring graduate or undergraduate students in research)



# Keep track of your progress

- ❖ Prepare an annual plan at the beginning of the year
- ❖ Perform an annual self-assessment at the end of the year



# How can others help?

- ❖ Throughout your career, seek advice. You can have many mentors
- ❖ Be aware of where you stand among your peers



# When is the right time to move on?

- ❖ The length of a postdoc may vary greatly depending on the specific field
- ❖ However, if you want to have a career, you cannot be a postdoc forever

	1 <sup>st</sup> YEAR POST-DOC	3 <sup>rd</sup> YEAR POST-DOC	5 <sup>th</sup> YEAR POST-DOC
National Institutes of the PostDoc Meat Grinder - or - Evolution of a Post-Ddoctoral Fellow			
General Demeanor:	GUNG-HO	BATTLE HARDENED	SHELL-SHOCKED
Motto:	BONZAI!	Slow and Steady Wins the Race	Another day, another chance to change careers
Career Aspiration:	Tenure Track Faculty Ivy League School	Biotech Company	Manager of Radio Shack
Relationship with Advisor:	Congenial	Guarded	Hostile
Each Experiment is:	A potential Nature paper	A possible prelude to a bigger result	Worthless Phenomenology
The Night Before a Big Result:	Can't Sleep	Doesn't expect experiment to work anymore	Forget what the experiment was

-Dent

➔ Don't let this happen to you!