

and a frantic 16-month period writing his textbook, *Essentials of Conservation Biology*³. “Even when writing the book, I took time off to play with my children,” he says.

Principal investigators should reassure lab members that they don't have to give up their lives to get ahead, says Stephan Wenkel, a plant scientist at the University of Copenhagen. “I tell people it's not about the hours, it's about efficiency,” he says. “I don't track my own hours, and I don't track the hours of the people in my group.”

The ‘9–5’ culture is very much alive in Denmark, says Wenkel, who is from Germany. “The institute empties in the evening,” he says. He adds that the Scandinavian region is renowned for promoting a healthy work–life balance. At his institute, scientists have the flexibility to deal with personal issues. “It's accepted here that people might have to leave in the afternoon because of a call from day care,” he says. The *US News & World Report* ranked Denmark third worldwide in quality of life in 2017, in part thanks to the country's family-friendly attitudes.

Wenkel warns lab members that long hours can actually hamper their work. “Efficiency has a bell-shaped curve,” he says. “Once you've reached that maximum,

“Everyone benefits from time away from work. You have to think about the whole person.”

things can start to fail because you aren't as focused.” He says that he has sent clearly fatigued lab members home to rest. Duffy says that she's personally

experienced the phenomenon of diminishing returns. “At some point, you make enough errors that you would be better off not working,” she says.

Duffy agrees that principal investigators need to stop policing the schedules of their staff. “That approach is not effective,” she says. She leaves working hours up to each of her own lab members, and expects them to allow time for non-scientific pursuits. “I've had multiple people in my lab who were endurance athletes,” she says. “They still get plenty of work done. If they hadn't told me, I never would have known that they were in the Iron Man [triathlon]. They have very good time-management skills.”

Science might not always fit into a schedule. But if done correctly, it can fit into a life. ■

Chris Woolston is a freelance writer in Billings, Montana.

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2. Campos-Arceiz, A., Koh, L. P. & Primack, R. B. *Biol. Conserv.* **166**, 186–190 (2013).
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COLUMN

Paths of glory

Look past the academia treadmill, says **Ushma S. Neill**.

It's a glorious time to be a researcher, as exciting discoveries — from immunotherapy to gene editing — energise the scientific community and society. But with threats to science funding looming worldwide, it's also a frustrating time to think about how to support yourself.

The thrill of being the first person to discover or corroborate a scientific concept can be a powerful impetus. And it is this exhilaration that keeps us going through years of apprenticeships as postdocs on low pay and few-to-no benefits, despite the repeated failure of experiments, the interminable administrative work and the time spent writing grant applications and papers.

But if this is what it takes to become an academic scientist, why do so many pursue that path, especially when so few faculty positions exist these days? Indeed, when colleagues and I recently polled 550 postdocs at our institution (Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) in New York City), 71% of respondents indicated that they intended to seek an academic appointment after their postdoc.

I don't want to dash any dreams, but national benchmarks indicate that only 15–20% of all scientific postdocs (closer to 20% at MSK) end up in tenure-track faculty positions.

You don't have to give up on science altogether if you decide against trying for an academic-research position. I am a poster child for ‘alternative’ careers in science: after my postdoc, I was an editor at two medical journals before moving to MSK, where I now oversee postdoctoral affairs and manage administrative details for our graduate-student programmes. I also teach classes in scientific communication and grantsmanship and coordinate computational biology, statistics and imaging courses.

And there are many like me working in universities in similar roles, or as bench scientists, core technologists, development administrators, clinical-trials directors or technology-development agents.

Biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies offer many rewarding roles at the bench (and beyond). Career positions abound in equity research, and in analysis and consultancy. There are also federal and other governmental positions, and innumerable non-profit foundations and professional societies are looking for programme officers, conference organizers and academic liaisons. Which attributes of your next position



matter most to you? Salary? Opportunities for leadership or professional development? Geographical location? Intellectual engagement? Flexibility in work hours to accommodate family obligations? Do you have a strong desire to work for a mission-driven organization?

Few positions that are likely to be open to you directly after your training will offer everything on your wish list straight away. Frankly, you will probably need to sacrifice wages at the outset to achieve long-term job satisfaction.

So how do you qualify for one of these careers? Your PhD (and a stint as a postdoc, if that's your path) gives you critical and analytical skills, problem-solving proficiency, an ability to learn quickly and a laser-like focus. What's more, the ability to work as a high-functioning team member is welcome everywhere. Turn your CV into a less academically focused summary (known as a *résumé* in the United States and other countries), by dropping your list of publications and fleshing out your role and the skills you developed during your training.

Did you write a fellowship? Take specialist classes in grant writing, communication, statistics, programming or time management and conflict resolution? Mentor trainees? Note these in detail on your CV. A LinkedIn profile with these entries is likewise advisable.

If you want to be a scientist, you can and should be. But only you can decide what flavour of scientist you want to be, how you will achieve that goal and what will prompt you every day to think, “I get paid to do this!?” ■

Ushma S. Neill is vice-president of scientific education and training at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.