Research, Etc.

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Published online: 23 February 2018

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I was fortunate to be mentored by a master teacher, Jack Michael. Jack's courses were structured to take best advantage of behavior principles. He partitioned the learning requirements into reasonably accomplished bits, set the occasion for focus on particularly important aspects of the materials, delivered a fast-paced, enthralling integration of those materials, demanded regular, active demonstrations of knowledge and understanding, and provided immediate feedback on performance. I adopted Jack's plan for my own courses, as I am sure many of his former students did as well. I tried to do as he did—to be like him.

The contingencies under which academics pursue their careers, at least in doctoral degree granting institutions of the present day, do not favor the partitioning of one's efforts in such a way as to become a master teacher, however. On the contrary, one's success as an academic is held to depend on one's accomplishments in three domains of “equally important” activity of which teaching is only one. The other two are research and service. In actual fact though, teaching effectiveness only matters if research productivity is unsatisfactory, and service does not matter under any circumstances. In short, the rules for success in the academy do not specify the operative contingencies. The contingencies are complex, and their impact on the likelihood of teaching effectiveness is worthy of consideration.

As research is considerably more equal than the other domains of equally important activity upon which an academic's success depends, we may begin by examining the contingencies maintaining research productivity. The number of peer-reviewed publications in the discipline's top-tier journals is the metric by which productivity in this domain is measured. Peer-reviewed publications in lower tier journals count for something, as do chapters in edited books. Empirical papers

are more highly valued than conceptual papers. If you produce a steady stream of some combination of these products over your first 6 years as an assistant professor, you are likely to be both tenured and promoted to the rank of associate. Another 6 years of this magnitude of productivity, coupled with national recognition of your work, will most likely earn you the rank of full professor. This is the aim of an academic career, and its achievement is evidence of success.

Resources are needed to conduct research and startup funds for new hires in our discipline tend to be lower than is needed to start up. As such, embedded in the contingency maintaining research productivity, as measured in peer-reviewed publications, is another contingency. The ill-specified contingency is that the key to your success as an academic is your capacity to generate external support for your scholarly activities in the form of grants and contracts. In short, you need to be doing something worthy of such support and you need to be doing what it takes to get it. Unfortunately, the chances of being awarded a federal grant, from NIH for example, are not good even for previously funded senior faculty. Only about 10% of the proposals to these sources are funded. The likelihood of federal funding for a junior faculty member, applying as a sole PI, to conduct disciplinary research in behavior analysis is pretty much nil.

One strategy here is to collaborate with successful grant-getters in more readily funded disciplines on research of an interdisciplinary sort. To be avoided in this circumstance are behavior analytic contributions of so inconsequential a sort as to preclude reasonable authorship order when the research is published. Another alternative is to secure contracts to provide services of some sort (e.g., clinical, educational, or organizational services) out of which some resources may be available to support research in those domains and beyond. One caution in adopting this strategy is that those upon whom your tenure and promotion depend do not give much weight to service contracts, in part because their indirect cost rates tend to be low and, more importantly, because it is not research.

The contingencies in effect to maintain research productivity, and the weights their outcomes are given in promotion,

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tenure, and merit compensation decisions cannot help but impact the energies expended by faculty on their teaching responsibilities. Importantly, the impact of these contingencies on teaching effectiveness is not inadvertent or unintended. Teaching effectiveness is not just less important than research productivity to one's success in the academy, it is not even required.

That teaching is of lesser value than research is evident in multiple sorts of evidence. First, a candidate's absence of teaching experience, much less effectiveness, is likely to be overlooked in hiring decisions if research productivity and/or potential is evident in the record. Second, teaching loads are assigned in accord with research expectations and productivity: New assistant professors are given reduced teaching loads to assure greater attention to research; more senior successful researchers routinely buy out of teaching responsibilities; and everyone in between is bartering for these prizes. Third, the practice of hiring lower paid non-tenure track instructors to replace the teaching responsibilities of regular faculty is becoming more prevalent in the academy. And finally, if effectiveness as a teacher was important to the success of an academic, then adequate means of measuring teaching effectiveness would be an inevitable feature of academic life, and this is not the case. Teaching effectiveness is not adequately defined, let alone measured, in many universities. Moreover, this is not an oversight. More often than not, there is strong opposition to the assessment of teaching effectiveness coming from the academic ranks, the rationale for which is typically some perversion of notion of "academic freedom." Universities are full of ineffective teachers who escape censure on the grounds of their having contributed considerable dollars to the indirect cost recovery accounts of their central administrations.

The conditions permitting the success of ineffective teachers are somewhat deceptive, however. You may achieve success as an ineffective teacher only so long as you continue to be a productive researcher, and to be a productive researcher, you have to generate the resources needed to be so. Startup funds upon your hire may be sufficient to purchase the equipment needed for your research, but it will never be enough to support your ongoing student labor costs. You need students and, understandably, students are attracted by the availability of support. In the absence of support, another reasonably effective means of attracting students to your lab is to be a good teacher. This is to say, the contingency by which teaching effectiveness emerges as secondary to research productivity is a conditional one.

Finally, let us consider the rule that providing service is predictive of your success as an academic. The rule does not

describe the operative contingency: You do not have to provide service to the university or to your profession to keep your job in the academy. Some effort in this regard may enhance records of teaching effectiveness and research productivity. It does not compensate for their absence, though. This is why junior faculty members are ill advised to assume administrative roles. The value of service in the overall scheme of things is evident in the fact that it tends to be ill defined and inadequately measured.

Nonetheless, there are circumstances in which service activity is critical to success in the academy. For example, failure to provide service is not personally or programmatically detrimental when the program at issue is Chemistry or Physics or Biology. These programs are under no threat of elimination at major universities. No such assurance is available for Behavior Analysis programs. You will be a successful academic in the field of behavior analysis only if you contribute to the survival of your academic program. If you do not, there may be no academic program in Behavior Analysis at your university in which to be successful. The same is true of professional service for a renegade discipline like behavior analysis. After all, somebody is organizing the conferences at which you are presenting your research. Somebody is editing the journals in which it is being published. And that somebody, sometimes, ought to be you.

In summary, when you enter the academy, you are likely to encounter a set of prescriptions for your success. Specifically, your success will be said to depend on your accomplishments in three domains of equally important activity: teaching, research, and service. These "rules for success" do not describe the contingencies operating for junior faculty members however. They are not prescriptions for success, but rather descriptions of success having been achieved. The rules describe how those who have become successful are operating: They are generating external support for their research; they are publishing regularly, teaching effectively, and providing needed service to their institutions and their professions.

My aim, simply, has been to suggest that a successful career in the academy requires considerable scrutiny of the correspondence between the rules for success and the operative contingencies. Following the "rules" from the outset may be treacherous. Cleave to the contingencies! Unavoidably, and unfortunately, the operative contingencies in doctoral degree-granting institutions of the present day are not the makings of master teachers. Not like Jack.