

Charting Your Path to Full

A Guide for Women
Associate Professors

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From Chapter 6, “Mapping your Mentoring Network” (144-9).

Consider if your department chair or dean has asked you the following questions:

1. Have you reviewed the expectations for promotion to the next level or rank?
2. What directions do you plan for your research and teaching to achieve the next level of excellence?
3. How can I help you achieve these goals?
4. Whom do you know who can provide mentoring support and feedback on these goals?

If the answer is no, then take the initiative and schedule an annual or biannual meeting to ask your department chair or dean these questions. Give him or her a copy of this book; maybe bookmark this page. Then document your conversations with a pleasant memo— memory is short, and department chairs and expectations have been known to change.

Conduct an Environmental Scan

An in-depth study at the University of Massachusetts (Misra et al. 2010) found that women faculty members are promoted at a slower rate than men faculty members are and that women faculty members are more burdened with service work. Further, women do not gravitate to the service work; they are asked to do it. For some reason, women faculty fail to develop a mentor network that will help us navigate these departmental expectations well. The first step in navigating is to conduct an environmental scan, on at least a yearly basis.

The possible consequence of failing to conduct an environmental scan is illustrated by a micromentoring session I experienced. I gave a keynote address to orient the faculty members, tenure track and not tenure track, and advisers to support more underrepresented students in science. It was an impressive multidisciplinary team, with people from science and English, that reflected the emphasis on science writing in this program. Afterward, a woman associate

professor from the liberal arts sought me out for a micromentoring session. She asked if I knew of resources to help women navigate promotion to full professor.

“Tell me more,” I said. She was receiving indirect messages from male full professors that concerned her. She felt that the direction of her work, while sufficient for promotion to associate professor, was not going to be supported to advance to full professor. In a heartfelt sigh, she observed that she would be devastated if declined for tenure. Then she said, “No one ever talked to me about preparing for promotion to full professor.” How, I wondered, could this incredibly competent person, who just received a big grant, be unsure of herself in this next career stage? Why was she still taking on undervalued service work at the expense of the research she wished to conduct? Why was she still saying yes to her department chair to do work that was not valued by the full professors? She had failed to scan her environment for what matters at promotion time.

Be Future Oriented

Conducting an environmental scan means identifying your access to resources to meet your future goals. At midcareer, it is time to think deeply about what you wish to do. Do you want to take your research in a new direction or develop that set of courses you always dreamed about? Do you want to provide mentoring to others around teaching or take on academic leadership opportunities? The time to start thinking about your resources and assets is the first year after promotion to associate rank or when you have received that next contract renewal at midcareer. Forget reality for a moment and instead imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could in every way, both professionally and personally. You are smiling at the letter you just opened notifying you of your promotion to full professor or to the senior ranks. Consider this set of questions:

- How do you feel?
- Whom do you tell first?
- What achievements do you feel really got you there?
- How did your colleagues support you?
- What new friends did you make along the way?
- Who is on your list to write a note of thanks to for support and collegueship?

Spend a few moments jotting down your answers to these questions. Imagine in detail what this moment is like, along with your reflection on what got you there. Positive psychology refers to the activity you just completed as a “best possible self” intervention. It has been shown to elevate optimism (Meevissen, Peters, and Alberts 2011) and positive emotions (Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2006), especially if you engage in this exercise regularly. Your results will direct your environmental scan. Make a list of all the people you would thank, all the possible funders of your work, all the professional societies or connections that provided you support. Conduct an environmental scan of your resources and assets. Consider these questions:

- With which professional associations do you affiliate?

- What other professional associations align with your interests?
- Who at your own institution holds a position to which you aspire (formally or informally)?
- What strengths are underused at present?
- What do you really enjoy doing?
- With whom do (or might) you enjoy collaborating?
- What self-care do you need to enact to stay refreshed and excited in your career?

Organize your responses into your goals and then two sets of resources. First, list your goals (aspirations). Second, list your personal resources (skills, joyful activity, personal network of support). Third, list who is accessible to you (at work and through your professional affiliations). Hold onto this list of assets for when we review how to develop your personal board of advisers.

What Got You Here Won't Get You There

Marshall Goldsmith (2008), a coach to Fortune 500 CEOs, offers advice that applies to midcareer women faculty members: “What got you here won't get you there.” What gets you to midcareer will not get you to the senior ranks. Somehow, we think we know the game by the time we are promoted, without realizing that the game has changed. The challenge of the midcareer period is that we have achieved some measure of success and ways of orienting and working. As Goldsmith's message suggests, successful people need to solicit feedback, reflect on it, and do something about it.

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The formal rules are usually easy to figure out (when you can find them), but it is the informal interpretation that is challenging. Those rules are different to advance to senior ranks and usually involve some greater reputation demonstrated at the national or international level and promise of leadership in the institution and the profession. Ask colleagues at the senior ranks or full professor how they believe expectations for the next promotion differ from the expectations for your last promotion. Start asking for feedback on your work and sit down with senior faculty for genuine conversations about your contributions. When you do receive feedback, thank people for it even if you think it is wrong. Resist the inclination to defend your actions. What you are receiving is important information about how you are perceived. After reflection, assemble an action plan.

SWOT

Conduct a final scan using the SWOT analysis as described in chapter 2. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to you, while opportunities and threats are external factors. For example, your teaching may be a strength, while prepping for new courses is a weakness as it may limit the time you have to devote to your aspirations (unless, of course, your aspiration is prepping a new course). Opportunities are what you could do— what doors might be open and interesting to walk through? For example, do you want to become the director of the honors program or of a special center on campus? Or might you be ready to take on an elected role in your professional association? Threats are factors that might limit your pursuit of opportunities. For example,

being asked to take on too many projects might be a threat to pursuing that one great opportunity. You now have a draft of your aspiration statement, a list of personal and professional resources, and a SWOT analysis. This is all in preparation to review and upgrade your personal board of advisers.

Strengths Internal	Weaknesses Internal	Opportunities External	Threats External

Figure 6.1 SWOT