

Need advice to
make your next
career move?

Science Careers Forum
www.ScienceCareers.org



Science



Magazine

News

Signaling

Careers

Multimedia

Collections

Science Careers From the journal *Science*

Jobs

Funding

Meetings and Events

Career Development

For Advertisers

About *Science Careers*

[Science Home](#) > [Science Careers](#) > [Career Development](#) > [Previous Issues](#) > [2008](#) > [2008-05-30](#) > DeWhyse

CAREER DEVELOPMENT : ARTICLES



minority scientists network

E-Mail This Article Print This Article Share This Related Articles



Educated Woman, Postdoc Edition, Chapter 16: Still Perky After All These Years

Micella Phoenix DeWhyse
United States
30 May 2008



Well, folks, I'm back for what looks like my next-to-last installment as I document my journey from grad school to postdoc and beyond. In case you missed [last month's](#) column, I have a new job starting soon and, yes, I'm still giddy despite slight annoyances from all of the things I need to do before my departure, i.e., finish papers, move, blah, blah, blah.

"Clarity is a gift." --
Micella Phoenix
DeWhyse

too long the fate I could have had if any number of things had gone differently. I was too guarded and giddy to be grave.

I've told my co-workers that I'm leaving research. Most of them seem to be relatively happy for me. A few pulled me aside to ask questions about where I'll be going and what I'll be doing, pledging to keep in touch, because they, too, might want to go do something else.

What I'll be doing in my new job is exactly what I said I wanted to be doing: using my analyst mind and my advocate heart to try to make the world a better place. I will interact with a variety of people, translate science into English, and work for an organization that looks at the broader implications of the scientific enterprise on the world--a consultant-ambassador kind of thing. Those of you who want my exact position and location, I offer instead my apologies. I don't want you all following me around; find your own newness!

The anti-fairy-tale life I've lived for the past 7 years has taught me that this moment, standing on the brink of the new and not staring into an abyss, is one to be treasured. The universe

BUSINESS OFFICE FEATURES

Packaging Yourself for
Product Companies
23 May 2008

Affinity Groups for
Diversity
9 May 2008

Not-So-Lost in Translation
17 April 2008

[More](#)

CAREER TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Current Employers

Learn more about the
employers advertising
positions on our site.

Science Careers Forum

Post a question, get an
answer on our online
community

Graduate Programs

Browse our database of
program profiles

How-To Guides

[Writing a resume/CV](#)

[Beating the interview](#)

[Getting funding](#)

[Managing a lab and staff](#)

[Building your network](#)

actually gave me what I wanted, and I am grateful.

My hesitancy about leaving bench science has vanished. The appropriateness of my choice (for me) was made very clear recently during a conversation with another friend. I met him when he was a postdoc. Thus far, he is miserably unhappy with his faculty position. Many would consider his feelings ungrateful and sacrilegious because he is failing to appreciate the opportunity he's been offered. He's keenly aware of his good fortune and appropriately riddled with guilt. We talk every few months about what is happening in his life and lab, and I could see, even before he was ready to admit it, that he was horribly unhappy and that he too wanted to leave academia.

The problem for him is that his research life has progressed much farther than mine, making leaving much harder. It's the third year of his faculty appointment, his lab is up and running, he has a few students, but he isn't happy. What's worse, he realizes he's never been happy in academic research. But he's terrified of making a change because he has never had an interview for a job outside of academia and he feels woefully inadequate when he starts thinking about what else he might do.

All good things ...

Be sure to check back next month for the final installment of a monthly series that started in February 2002. Micella's final opus will appear on 27 June.

But he finally has come to the realization that he *must* do something different because his current holding pattern isn't working.

Aside from the professor part, that's the life that I was living. Only when I started the informational interviewing and the applications and received the rejections and the positive feedback did I start to rebuild the confidence that I could be anything I want, not just what I have been trained to be. Some people might call it selfish: How could I deprive the scientific world of another worker it worked hard to train and--probably more important--of a proper role model for minority women?

I call it self-preservation. I got tired of waking up every morning dreading going to work and hating what I did. It corrodes the soul.

Clarity is a gift, and I'm taking these clear moments of feeling confident about the decision I've made and relishing them, cultivating them, liquefying them and spraying them on the windshield so that it will stay clear, defeating the constant fog I've been driving through for years. I've also started purging, evaluating the stuff, habits, and thoughts that don't reflect the "me" I am becoming and jettisoning the ones that don't fit.

An enormous weight has been lifted thanks to these changes in my life. And why *can't* I change? I remember saying to myself in graduate school that my degree would open doors. But as I got to the end, I didn't have the strength or the confidence to turn any of those handles to see what might lurk behind. Even if they were painful, those last 2 years of postdocing were like therapy, healing the wounds inflicted by the insanity of graduate school.

I'm sure I'm ready to move on, because when another colleague told me about his new faculty position, I was nothing but happy for him. No envy, no rage, not a blip on the radar. I am now completely sure that I have made the right decision and can make my exit in peace.

I'll ask one more time: Is there anything you, dear reader, would like me to address before I move on in a couple of months? Any burning questions that Micella must answer before she rides off into the sunset?

All the best to you, dear readers. Despite all that has happened, I'm still perky.
micella.phoenix.dewhyse@gmail.com

Salary Tools

Find out how much you're worth with our salary calculator

[To Advertise](#) [Find Products](#)

Micella Phoenix DeWhyse is a pseudonym.	Comments, suggestions? Please send your feedback to our editor .
Image: Photodisc	DOI: 10.1126/science.caredit.a0800078

RELATED CONTENT

[Educated Woman: The Grad School Adventures of Micella Phoenix DeWhyse - Index](#)

27 August 2004,

[Educated Woman: The Grad School Adventures of Micella Phoenix DeWhyse-- Chapter 1: Why Am I Here?](#)

1 February 2002,

 [E-Mail This Article](#)  [Print This Article](#)  [Share This](#)  [Related Articles](#)

[Magazine](#) | [News](#) | [Signaling](#) | [Careers](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [Collections](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#) | [RSS](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Privacy / Legal](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2008 American Association for the Advancement of Science. All Rights Reserved.
AAAS is a partner of HINARI, AGORA, PatientInform, CrossRef, and COUNTER.