TESTING THE MARKET

Job-Hopping to Greater Career Heights

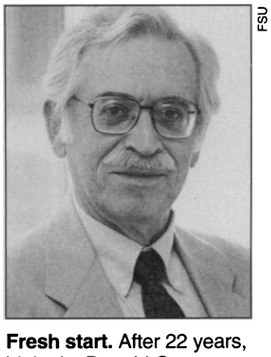
Senior faculty members are jumping jobs more often these days.

Two years ago, immunologist Tom Tedder's career was cruising in high gear. At age 36, he was an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School in Boston with a joint appointment at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. He had a well-supported lab and access to some of the nation's top graduate students, and was a valued member of a department filled with top-notch immunologists.

But Tedder was restless. "I needed room to spread my wings intellectually," he says, "and I needed to see what my value was in the larger community." So Tedder did what any good member of a capitalist society would do: He put his skills on the market to see how much they were worth.

In his case, the answer was a full professorship, a new laboratory, increased institutional support, and a department chairmanship at Duke University Medical Center. He moved there last November and has few regrets. "I miss Boston some, but my situation here, professionally and personally, is tremendous," says Tedder, who believes that faculty members should always be testing the marketplace "to see if the field considers you one of the major players." He says: "I recommend this to everyone."

Not everyone finds their services in such demand that they can pull up anchor and sail to a new world in this way. Indeed, "the average faculty member stays put once they get tenure," says Irvin Levitan, director of Brandeis University's Center for Complex Systems in Waltham, Massachusetts. Nevertheless, many university administrators and department chairs believe that their senior faculty members are jumping jobs more often these days. "There does seem to be some rise in the movement of established scientists over the past decade," says Levitan. Adds biochemist Chris Raetz, who has gone from a tenured position at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to a vice-presidency at Merck, to a department chairmanship at Duke Medical Center: "In industry, it's always been common to move from one company to another. Academia is just catching up."



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Fresh start. After 22 years, biologist Donald Caspar left Brandeis University for Florida State and the chance "to try new things."

What it takes. To get a sense of scientific mobility in the 1990s, *Science* spoke to 41 job-hopping researchers and 10 administrators. One critical fact that emerged is that you need considerable professional standing to pull up stakes and land on your feet. "There just aren't that many positions open for tenured faculty, so you need to be at the top of your field to merit good offers at the senior level," says Kern Wildenthal, president of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas (UT Southwestern).

And you need connections. "These aren't the jobs listed in the back of *Science*," says Glen Evans, who moved from the Salk Institute in June to an endowed chair in the new McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development at UT Southwestern. "These are the jobs you find out [about] by putting the word out, by accepting offers to give seminars."

That's how Tedder hopped. In 1993, he was invited to give a seminar at Duke University. He accepted, knowing that he was on a short list for potential department chairs. Soon afterward, Duke made him an offer, and he accepted. There was very little dickering: "Duke had been hiring a number of department chairs, and so they knew what it would take to get someone." His old home, Harvard University, had little to say other than to wish him well. "Harvard upset? Not when there were 10 good people lined up behind me," he says.

Loyalty old-fashioned. Indeed, among the high fliers, no one can afford to get too sentimental about institutional ties. Tedder, for one, sees loyalty and identification with a particular institution as a carry-over from a more opulent era. "With university fortunes rising and falling, you need to be prepared to go to an institution that is willing and able to support your particular area of research."

Electrical engineer Mohammed N. Islam, who left a senior research position at AT&T Bell Laboratories for a tenured slot at the University of Michigan, thinks institutional loyalty is for stick-in-the-muds. Asked if he was settling permanently, he replied, "Surely you're joking. This is a wonderful place, but I see myself staying only 5 to 7 years."

Anatomy of a job move. Not every job-hopper is so peripatetic. Physicist Bill Reay, for instance, has no plans to move again after a recent hop to Kansas State University. Two years ago Reay was a reasonably contented 26-year veteran of Ohio State University. He wasn't actively looking to change, but in November of 1992 he got inquiries from three institutions looking for new heads for their high-energy physics programs. Reay gave seminars at all three and used the opportunity to check them out as they took a good look at him. One institution, says Reay, merely wanted a caretaker, someone to run what was already in place. So he said no thanks. Another university offered him a nice package: a 10% salary hike, $150,000 to cover lab start-up costs, and a pledge to hire a dozen new faculty members over the next decade for the high-energy physics program. That was tempting, "But I would have had to raise [another] $150,000 for start-up costs for each of the new faculty." Again, Reay said no thanks.

On he went to number three, Kansas State University. His initial visit went well, and Reay was impressed by the university's offer to make high-energy physics a featured area of research. But there was still something missing. "I had worked with [Ohio State physicist] Noel Stanton for 26 years, and it struck me as only a little short of immoral to just leave him at Ohio State, particularly since Noel and I are a great team." No problem. Kansas State invited Stanton down, and he fell in love with the university. By March of 1993, Reay and Stanton both got offers, which included money to bring most of the high-energy physics group from Ohio State, funds for additional support staff, and two new faculty hires over the next 2 years. "I'm sure there was sacrifice on the university and department's part to put together this package, but they were serious and let us know it," says Reay.

He waited to see what Ohio State's answering bid would be, but it was no contest. "They matched the salary increase, but they couldn't touch the other parts of the package," says Reay. So he and Stanton were

installed in Kansas by July. He admits that "the physics department at Ohio State was pretty upset."

Other scientists, like Reay, move so they can continue growing. "When you need to expand and your institution doesn't have the funds to accommodate you, then you have to look elsewhere," says Barbara Knowles, a developmental biologist who last year left her position at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia after 26 years in order to move to expanding facilities at The Jackson Laboratories in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Abandoning tenure. Loyalty is one thing, but what about leaving the security of tenure? "I think tenure is overrated," says aerospace engineer David Norton, who gave up a tenured position at Texas A and M University after 16 years to be director of space research at the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC). "We have an easy time recruiting people to leave academic jobs to come to HARC." Others agree. "Giving up tenure was not a problem," says robotics specialist Ralph Hollis, who left a secure position at IBM's Thomas J. Watson Research Center for a nontenured post at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Hollis is one of those people who get fired up by risk. "It just means that I have to keep working hard, and that's fine by me." Plus, "I feel invigorated. Now I'm popping with ideas for new projects, and I have access to a great group of graduate students to help me."

Time for change. "I think faculty are starting to realize that different environments, different institutions may be appropriate for different stages of their professional life," said Douglas J. Ringler, an immunologist who left a life he loved at Harvard for one he loves even better as director of experimental therapeutics at LeukoSite, a start-up biotechnology company. "For me, I needed a new set of challenges. I wanted to be a part of taking my research from the lab to the clinic."

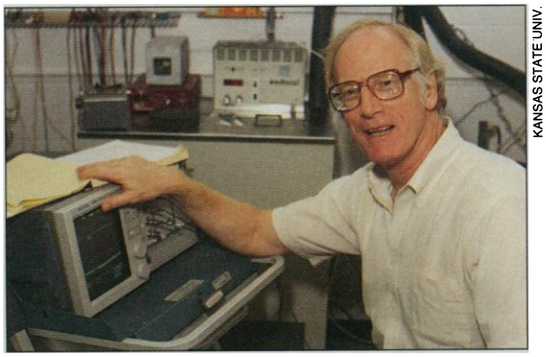
Some people make equally big changes between educational institutions. After 22 years heading the structural biology laboratory at Brandeis, Donald Caspar opted for a sabbatical at Florida State University. Soon afterwards, he decided to move there permanently. "It didn't take long to realize that here I would have the opportunity to try new things, to get away from having to be responsible for running a big university facility," says Caspar. Bradford Mundy, a synthetic organic chemist, decided in midlife to go small. After spending 25 years at Montana State University, he moved to tiny Colby College in Maine. "When you have to keep the wheels greased with graduate students who need to successfully complete their project in order to get a job, it's hard to try something totally new or daring," he says. So he dispensed with graduate students by moving to Colby, a liberal arts college with no graduate program. "Now, I work exclusively with undergraduates, and I'm having a ball," says Mundy. "Sure, the work goes a little slower, but I also don't have to spend as much time writing grants, and I can take more risks because I don't have to worry as much about publishing." And Colby has furnished him with new laboratory space and state-of-the-art analytical equipment that he doesn't have to wait in line to use.

One thing that's apparent about those who leave cushy jobs for unknown challenges is that they are a species that thrives on new situations and intellectual stimuli. "When you first start out as an assistant professor, there's the challenge of setting up your own lab, securing funding, training your first students, attracting your first postdocs, and of course publishing and getting tenure. But after you've accomplished that, then what? It's too easy to settle into an intellectual rut," says Norton of HARC. He now plans to take what he's learned during his academic career and use it to solve technical problems faced by Texas corporations. "It's a whole new approach to research for me."

Playing on a team. For some, it's not so much novelty they seek as the opportunity to work closely with others. Physiologist Matthew Kluger, who last October left the University of Michigan after 21 years to become director of the Institute for Basic and Applied Medical Research at the nonprofit Lovelace Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, says that although he misses his students, "I wanted to work as part of an interactive team, and so I found a place where that was part of the culture."

The opportunity for teamwork is one of the main incentives for hopping out of academia altogether. "Certainly, leaving academia was hard, and many of my colleagues thought I was nuts," says Ringler about his decision to move to LeukoSite. "But working in industry is incredibly stimulating because of the cooperation and collaboration you get. Here, I get to work with experts in a number of fields. In academia, it's largely every person for themselves."

Some scientists are finding ways to combine both worlds. Pharmacologist Donald McDonnell, who moved from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston to Ligand Pharmaceuticals and then to Duke, says, "My experience has changed the focus of my research. Working in industry helps you put your research in perspective."



KANSAS STATE UNIV.

Hopping for a higher profile. Physicist Bill Reay was wooed from his home at Ohio State University by three schools, but was won over when Kansas State University placed a lot of resources in his field, high-energy physics.

Hopping has a price. For all the joys of job-jumping, it does have downsides. "It's inconvenient professionally and personally, and there's got to be a good inducement," says Reay, whose move from Ohio to Kansas was "financially...a big hit for my family, and my wife still hasn't found a job." And "if I had known how hard it is to get a reserved parking place on campus I would have had that put in my offer." Islam says that leaving industry for academia meant losing the daily interactions with his peers at Bell Labs. "At Michigan I deal mostly with graduate students, and I have to be more careful about how I respond to my students' ideas than I did with my colleagues. It's been an adjustment."

Then, too, the grapevine holds stories of scientists who moved and wish they hadn't. But those who spoke to *Science* were largely pleased with their new lives. Ralph Hollis says of his family's move to Pittsburgh: "This was not a place we had ever planned on moving. It was like jumping off a bridge without a bungee cord...[but] we've had such a fabulous time that none of us has one regret about making this decision."

–Joseph Alper