

# Top 10 Lessons I've Learned in Becoming a Faculty (and beyond)

Karina Davidson, Ph.D.

Herbert Irving Associate Professor of Medicine & Psychiatry  
Co-Director of the Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health  
Columbia University Medical Center

## 1. *Know yourself*

If you don't know what you want, none of the further lessons apply. What you want will change across time, so find a way to check in with yourself regularly, or you will head on a path you won't enjoy. Be mindful of your feelings—dreading something on a regular basis at work should tell you something.

## 2. *Know what is reinforced in your position.*

Is it top-tier publications? Funding yourself? Seeing more clients than anything else? Ask what is seen as successful, and if it agrees with #1 lesson do that, rather than what everybody else is doing. If it DOESN'T comply with what you want to do, look for another situation.

## 3. *Understand the unfunded mandates at your job; separate them into what you must do, and what is optional.*

Everyone has to do some service, some teaching, some management. BUT what you need to do to succeed and what are just things that everyone else doesn't want to do (leaving you holding the bag) can be distinguished, and should be monitored.

## 4. *Learn how to negotiate.*

Professionals with long training periods (such as psychologists) haven't had the job interviews, business deals, and general experience of many others of that age. Practice before you negotiate for anything important. Ask friends in business or law to do a mock interview before an important position interview. Write out what you want. Talk to folks already there, so you know what you should negotiate for, and what cannot be negotiated. You will get better over your professional life, but mistakes in your first few negotiations can be costly to your happiness.

## 5. *Learn how to set goals, track your goals, report on your goals, and complete them (even if your goals have changed).*

Any position appreciates seeing in writing what you plan to do, and then that you did it. Learn a system that works for you, and use it whether your internship/postdoc/assistant professorship/practice partners ask you for it. It will help with Lesson #1.

6. *Learn how to say no graciously.*

This is another life lesson. If you are going to do what makes you happy, and accomplish the goals you have set for yourself, you have to say no to many opportunities that just aren't right for you. Practice a style that works for you.

7. *Learn how to manage staff.*

No matter where you are, or what you do, you will spend a lot of time doing this (even if it doesn't make you happy). Better to learn how to do it well early, rather than suffering the agonies of doing it poorly for a long time.

8. *Learn how to manage money.*

Ditto to above points.

9. *Learn how to manage your mentor(s).*

You will have mentors your whole life. Don't waste their time (they are engaging in an unfunded mandate). Send them an agenda, then stick to it. Send them action items after the meeting, and then stick to those. Cancel meetings you don't need. You will enjoy your interactions, as will they.

10. *Have fun.*

No career or success means anything if you don't enjoy yourself at work. Give yourself permission to do what you enjoy, and to negotiate to minimize those things you don't.