

# SUCCESS IN ACADEMIA

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COMPILED BY LEAH KARLINER BASED ON THE WISDOM OF THE CADC COMMUNITY

CENTER FOR AGING IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

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Center for Aging in  
Diverse Communities

UCSF



# HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS IN ACADEMIA?

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# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

## INSTRUMENTAL AREAS

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- Grant funding as PI and Co-I
- Regular/consistent publications
- Promotion (by steps & levels)
- Professional recognition at various levels, e.g., locally, nationally, internationally

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

## PERSONAL SATISFACTION

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- Success is to be continuously employed doing what I really like to do
- Doing research/work that brings you joy
- Working on what interests/motivates/compels you
- Continuous learning and gaining expertise
- Helping/watching your mentees succeed
- Having strong and satisfying collegial relationships
- Having a reputation for being helpful and collegial with colleagues,
- Being well respected interpersonally
- Being kind to people and always be willing to help if you can because that leaves you with close colleagues and the satisfaction of contributing to others work

# WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE? IMPACT OF THE WORK

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- Results of research are implemented outside the research context
- See some impact among the people for whom I do the work, whether it's patients, trainees, staff, or community
- Improving lives of others through research and waking up (most days) wanting to work on improving lives of others through research
- Making a real difference in policy/practice/people's lives



# CONCERNS – CAN I GET THERE?

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- Will I be able to fund myself for my entire career?
- Competing clinical or teaching responsibilities and lack of protected time/financial support to complete research
- I'm worried I'll get worn down by the rejection of grants and paper writing
- Struggles with academic writing
- Will my work ever be fully embraced by the NIH/academic medicine model?
- There is a constant feeling of having to fight systems of oppression in academia and deal with personal feelings of discouragement when change is slow
- Burnout – the emotional toll of doing work on health equity/health disparities

# STRATEGIES TO GET THERE: COLLABORATIONS

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- Create strong collaborations to help with grants, funding, and academic progress
- Recognize your strengths and weaknesses, play to your own strengths, find colleagues with complementary strengths and weaknesses.
- A strong research identity (a coherent program of research)
- Have a wide range of interests—this leads to diversity in funding and collaborations, ongoing intellectual growth
- Don't be flaky; stick to your commitments (so, don't overcommit)
- Be embedded in communities—it's good for impact, and for recharging one's own battery, and helps you keep perspective about what's important



# STRATEGIES TO GET THERE: BE OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES AND CHANGE

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- Continue seeking training and career development opportunities – you never know where that will lead you
- Be flexible---things may not go the way you plan, but when they don't, there may be an opportunity to do something innovative
- Remember: you are in the driver's seat of your career, change it up if you're not satisfied and have a plan B
- Say “no” to things that don't bring you joy or advance your agenda; practice with easy/low-risk things
- Have confidence in and follow your heart/gut; don't listen to one-size-fits-all prescriptions about what 'success' looks like





# STRATEGIES TO GET THERE: SOME NITTY GRITTY

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- Writing skills are essential
  - Set aside writing time on your calendar; make it non-negotiable
  - Get editing help – seek out resources on campus; pay for professional editor
  - Form a writing group with your peers
- Verbal presentation skills are essential:
  - practice,
  - seek out feedback and coaching
- Use consultants and workshops: writing, graphic design, public speaking, leadership

# STRATEGIES TO GET THERE: SOME NITTY GRITTY

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- Start grant proposals and papers early; waiting until the last minute is stressful for you and everyone around you
- Seek out databases or resources outside of your Division/Department, outside of UCSF
- Seek out career mentorship beyond your immediate chief/chair – from leaders and from others outside of your division/department: ask to meet annually
- Seek out constructive feedback; others are invested in your success, you don't have to do everything on your own
- Find spaces that feel safe where you don't have to 'code-switch'



# STRATEGIES TO GET THERE: SELF-CARE

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- Surround yourself with good people -- good at what they do, and good human beings with positive energy
- Love your work, love your colleagues, don't worry if the world doesn't seem to love you back – they might just not 'get it' yet
- Open reviewer feedback on grant proposals and manuscripts when it arrives, look at it quickly, and then set it aside for a few days; ask a trusted colleague to help you read through it so you have support
- Don't let others with outsized egos get under your skin
- Know that you have made it this far, so you are already highly qualified and successful---value yourself and your contributions
- Take vacation and actually disconnect from email and other work communications: it is important to recharge

# HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

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“How you define success in the future may be very different from how you define it now; be open to that--if you are following your heart, then such shifts are successes, not failures”

---Steve Gregorich, PhD and CADC sage

