Life in the academia: Forty years of fun and *games* (and hard work)

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Contents

1   My background

- Started university in 1969 (49 years ago!)

- B.Sc. in 1973 (Mathematics [Minor: Operations Research]).

- M.Sc. in 1975 (Operations Research [Minor: Statistics]).

- Ph.D. in 1979 (Management Sciences) 39 years ago!

- Still having fun and working $\sim$6 days a week. (I always take a day off each week.)

- Academic life:

  - Best profession in the world!

  - They pay us for doing things that we love doing!

– And, you are your own boss (for the most part).

– Maxim: "Do what you love, love what you do!"

2 Your life as a Ph.D. student (4–5 years)

- Ph.D. work is an investment in your future.

  - "Short term pain, for long term gain."

  - Low income and hard work now; higher income (and prestige) and even harder work later.

- Best Ph.D. thesis is a completed thesis. Focus on what you are doing.

- But don't be too upset if you have a mental block for a few weeks, or so.

- *Disclaimer*: I don't mean to override/contradict what your supervisor tells you about research. But here is what I do and what I tell *my students*:

– Be organized.

* Set goals, deadlines for what you are doing.

* Go to bed with a plan for tomorrow.

* Write periodic (weekly?) summaries of what you have achieved. Submit them to your supervisor (if he/she is interested). ★<See, **Periodic report on home page**>

– Don't expect your supervisor to provide you with all the ideas. You *must* generate some of them!

– When you write papers (or, your thesis), don't forget the following:

* Is your work *original*?

* Is it *interesting*?

* Is the *math correct*? (If you use math.)

* Is it *well-written*?

∗ In summary, write *citable* papers. (Google Scholar vs. Web of Science [ISI].)

– If English is not your mother tongue (and even if it is), read, read and read (not just academic work but also novels, magazines and newspapers)

– Go to the library and look at books and journals. YES, there are such places we call libraries!

– Don't assume that Google knows everything.

• Try to submit and publish at least one paper *before* graduation.

• Discuss your work/thesis with your friends.

• Prepare your c.v. for the job interviews.

3   Job interview

- Dress well.

- Prepare your slides carefully.

  - Five or six bullets per page.

  - Keep each bullet short.

  - Limit the $\#$ of pages to about 30-35 (if you have 60 minutes).

    * If you have N pages, and if each page takes about two (2) minutes, then you need about $2N$ minutes!

  - Don't be offended if someone in the audience becomes aggressive.

  - If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest about it. Don't try to fudge your answers.

4   Your life as an assistant professor (5–6 years)

- Publish or perish.

- After graduation, find an academic mentor in your department who can help you.

- Generating research ideas.

  – First of all, finish and submit all the original work from your thesis.

  – Look around. (My "Elevator positioning," "Free shipping" papers.) ★<See, **Both on home page**>

  – Sometimes you get research ideas from other papers. Go to the library. Look at books and journals.

- – Discussions with your colleagues and your mentor (if you have one).

- Always try to *target* FT50 journal quality in your work. But let's face it, not all of our papers are FT50 quality! ★<See, **FT50 list on home page**>

  - – So, don't submit *all* of your papers to FT50 journals. Why?

- If you are doing joint work, try to contribute your share $(1/n)$.

- Choose an attractive (and informative) title.

  - – Grab the reader's (referee's) attention with the first sentence in the first paragraph.

  - – Spell check, including the references!

- Organize the paper well.

- Show your paper to colleagues.

- When your paper is finished, don't submit it right away! Sit on it for a few days, and read it again. I am sure you will revise a few things to improve it.

- There are books on how to write academic papers; e.g., Krantz's "*A Primer on Mathematical Writing*," AMS, Providence, 1997. Read them.

- Alphabetical ordering of names is safest assuming all co-authors will contribute roughly equally to the work. But,

  - If your co-author Dr. Al. E. Gatr (🐊) doesn't contribute much and always rides on your coattails, don't write papers with him in the future. Don't argue about the ordering of names.

- *My policy*: Always alphabetical, except when a PhD student is a co-author. Example for exception: Yao and Parlar; *not* Parlar and Yao. (Liu-fang [Sophia] Yao.)

- In the long run, everyone's contribution should be roughly equal.

- **Responses to referees.**

  - Make *their* life easy!

  - Write each question asked by the referees, and answer them, providing page numbers and even line numbers. Thank them for their helpful comments, etc. ★<See, **NRL paper on home page**>

- **Plagiarism:** Can't copy and paste other people's sentences/paragraphs.

- – Really, you just *cannot* do that! Use your own words, or put others' words inside quotes: "Blah-blah-blah."

- *Can't* submit your paper *simultaneously* to two or more journals. This actually happened and I was asked to referee the same paper for two different journals at the same time.

  - – The authors are now *black-listed* by the two journals. ★<See, **Double submission! on home page**>

- Your third year as an assistant professor: Contract renewal.

- Your fifth or sixth year: Promotion and Tenure.

  - – If denied, you have to leave!

5 Grants, software, focussing

- Apply for a **grant**, e.g., NSERC/SSHRC, as soon as possible. You can't function in the academia without research grants.

- For Management Science students:

  - Very helpful to be an expert in a good mathematical software: Maple?

  - Use LaTeX for typesetting (e.g., *Scientific Word*), <u>NOT</u> Microsoft Word!

  - We have so much computing power now. Use it wisely.

  - How did we manage in the old days?

    * Mainframe ♠. Fortran IV (Punch cards) ♠. Slide rules ♠. Typewriters (IBM Selectric) ♠. Finally; IBM-PC ♠.
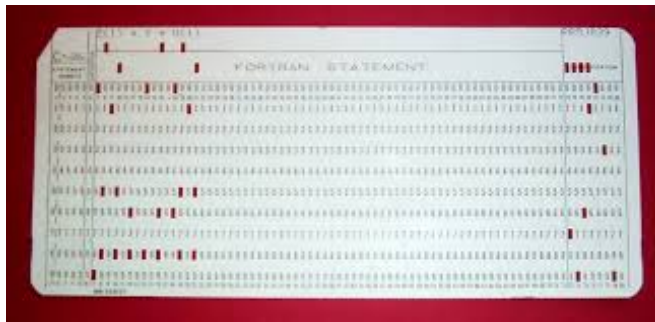
- You need physical exercise for a clear mind. "*Just do it!*"

  – Jogging is best, if your knees are OK.

- Focusing on work:

- Turn off your phone while working!

- Turn off your e-mail program while working!

- Face the wall. Don't be distracted by irrelevant things around you.

6   Teaching

- You must love teaching, otherwise...

- Prepare well.

- Speak slowly. (I sometimes have to force myself to remember this.)

- Write things on the board/screen, and do it clearly, AND ask your students to take notes (old school way)

    - I <u>NEVER, NEVER</u> use Powerpoint.

    - What did Confucius (*Kongzi*) say about all this?

- Volunteer to teach new courses.

- Respect your students. They are adults.

- Lower yourself to the level of students. They don't know what you know.

- Be organized.

- When you start supervising Ph.D. students, ask them to give you periodic reports on what they have done, what they have learned, whether or not they came up with new ideas. (Mentioned above.)

7 Service

- Refereeing.

  - Submit report within three months (max).

  - Summarize paper's findings. Is the paper, (i) original, (ii) interesting? (iii) Is the math correct, and (iv) is it well-written?

  - If the answer to any one of these is NO, you may *recommend* rejection.

  - Referee don't reject papers, editors do.

  - General critique. Specific points, typos, etc.

  - But say something nice, too; if you can.

- I referee **at least twice** the number of papers I have published. Why?

- Try to serve on some committees.

- *Volunteer* to do things.

- Be a good "citizen."

8   Some suggestions

- Google's motto: "Don't be evil!"

- Golden Rule: ♡

  – Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Mohammed, etc. "Treat others as you would like others to treat you." (Be good)

– Jewish version (Hillel, 100 BCE): "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow men." (Don't be evil) I like this version more.

- Be kind to your colleagues.

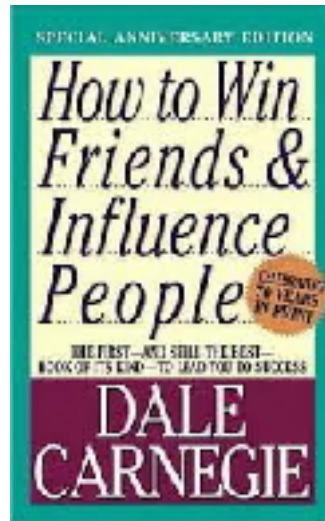 – You can criticize someone's idea/proposal, but don't turn it into a personal attack.

- Keep your door open when a student visits your office.

- Always have a positive attitude: "Glass is half full."

- Remember, we are the lucky minority for where we have arrived.

- Enjoy the fun and games, and the hard work.

- Read this book:

- Have a hobby.

  - For many years, Somerset Maugham literature was my hobby. I almost wrote a paper on his work! ★<See, **Maugham on home page**>

- "You're too busy. Take a *Schultz Hour*."

  - George Schultz was Reagan's Secretary of State in the 1980s.

- – Carved out one hour each week for quiet reflection.

- – He stayed in his office for one hour, closed the door and told his secretary not to interrupt him (except when his wife or the President calls). Meditation?

- – We all need this one "Schultz Hour" each week!

- Coloring books?