

Karoun H. Bagamian: Welcome to the Business of Doing Science podcast brought to you by Bagamian Scientific Consulting. On this podcast, we discuss different aspects of pursuing science -related careers and just how science is actually done beyond the bench. So stay tuned to find out more.

Hello everyone, I'm Karoun Bagamian. Today I'm joined by my cohost Lindsey Laytner and Heidi Bolduc and our special guest, Katherine Sayler, to discuss how to start your non-academic job search. Lindsey and Katherine in particular have a lot of experience and knowledge in this area and we are delighted to have this opportunity to learn from them.

Lindsey, take it away.

Lindsey Laytner: Thank you, Karoun. Today I'm going to be talking a little bit about how to start your non-academic job search because many of you are probably the most familiar with academia and actually acquiring jobs outside of it requires a little bit of a different approach. And I think for a lot of recent graduate students who are leaving academia or may want to leave academia... a lot of times you feel like you're a fish out of water. You're not really sure where to start. You aren't sure if you want to go into industry, government, consulting, or perhaps a non-profit. And regardless of the type of job you're applying for, you're going to be doing research of some kind. However, while this is not your PhD research topic, the same process will be applied. But there are some steps that you're going to want to consider and that's something that we're really going to be talking about. So as I go through some of these steps, my co-hosts are going to chime in and we'll talk about them a little bit in depth and we'll give some of our own personal experiences.

But first things first, we're going to talk a little bit about, you know, the four stages of career development, which I think is something that most recent graduates really need to be aware of.

So, first it's self assessment. So this is, you know, a critical step where you're going to be reflecting a little bit on you.

The second is to actually, like, do some occupational research, which we'll talk about.

Third is to set some goals, like, where do you see yourself in the next three to five years, 10 plus years, what have you, kind of like those long term, short term goals.

And then that last step is going to be actually getting to the nitty gritty, the job search, the resume development, the interviewing, landing the job, et cetera, which we will cover in another episode.

So, we'll just jump right into the self assessment part. And this is really, like I mentioned, pretty critical, because if you don't get this step done correctly, then it's going to kind of set you into a spiral of probably getting into a career that you may not necessarily like, or it may not be a good fit for you because the self assessment is where you're really going to be thinking about, you know, what are your general interests? It could be the research that you're doing, or maybe it's something out of the research. Maybe you just love nutrition and you find yourself thinking about that all the time. And so maybe you want to go and explore that a little bit more.

Write down all those things. Start to take, a poll of, your strong interest inventory, if you will, and really start to think about that and be introspective and, and maybe you need help with this, right? I, I don't know about you guys, but...

Karoun H. Bagamian: I think, yeah, I think asking around and that usually does help. And one of the things, I think this is a really important, crucial first step- in addition to just your interests, I think it's also important to look at what you enjoy for your work life. You know, I think a lot of times people start leaving academics because they feel that it's a very consuming job and you need to be working a lot, and then accidentally get another job that's exactly as consuming, you know, and they don't want that. I think it's like, it's hard to figure it out. Or you think that you want a nine to five, but you really do want flexibility. So I think that's also a part of, besides your interests, really looking into what, what works best for you and your working life and what you really want for that too.

And like you said, reaching out to other people and hopefully listening to this podcast, cause we interview a lot of people from different careers to kind of see what it really is like in some of these different professions.

Katherine Saylor: I think that's a really great point that you make about self assessing your priorities.

So this for me was a really big challenge about being truly honest with myself. It takes some deep introspection, as Lindsey mentioned, and you have to kind of sit down and say, is work life balance my number one priority? Is impact of my

research on the public like an immediate appreciable impact that folks can really like, you know, changes people's lives?

Is that the number one priority? Is writing daily the number one priority? Or, you know, finding basically this list of priorities of, what is most important to you about your work and being truly honest and not letting it be based in fear of, "Oh, I don't, you know, maybe let's leave out industry cause it's too scary because I don't know anything about it."

But just really being reflective and really being honest, which is a tall task, but pays dividends, I think in the end.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah, really true. Definitely.

Lindsey Laytner: Definitely, I think so too. I think also just thinking about how much you want to interact with science, if you're coming from science, you know, because sometimes you might be like, "I don't want anything to do with this, or I want to go real general, or I want to be super specific into some field."

That'll narrow your search, right, later on because you're like, "Well, I've already done X, Y, and Z, I know that I want this amount of science in my life. I don't want this amount of detail." Or maybe you want to think about where you want to live. Like, "I want to live, you know, not in New York City. I don't want those jobs that are clustered there." So just thinking about that. And then I think to Karoun, I know you mentioned this, but just the work environment.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah.

Lindsey Laytner: You know, the culture is super important. And if you don't think about those things or what's really important to you, it's going to be a lot of trial and error before you figure it out 10 years down the line and you're like, "Damn, I wish I had known this right off the get go- this is what I need to do."

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. Not operating out of fear, as Katherine said, I

think that's a really good point because sometimes you can be very brave in a lot of ways, but in certain ways, you don't even realize the fears you have until, like she said, you really go deep and think about them. So, I thought that was a really great point.

Katherine Saylor: Yeah, and I want to echo something about the culture. The culture... man, that is a tough one to pin down. And I think the more time you can spend kind of interviewing your interviewers and really trying to get a hold on what their priorities are around work, like what the day to day really looks like. It may be the most important thing.

So in an industry position that I had, most important thing is the boss basically wanted to be the last person at work and you better beat him there. And you already better be working. No, that's just like such a nuanced, very specific thing, but it's reflective of the general culture, which is, you know, you're a worker bee, and you need to be working. And I'm going to kind of check in, in a

sense to make sure that's happening. And if you're okay with that, then that's totally fine. But if that makes you really uncomfortable, or it... what's that?

Lindsey Laytner: It makes you angry.

Katherine Saylor: If it makes you angry, that might not be the place.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. Absolutely. That reminds me, like, when I was in graduate school, I really like a hands off approach and I, I do not respond well to negative reinforcement. But another grad student, she was like, "I actually really need that." And she didn't work with the same person I did but whatever her advisor was doing was working for her and it really wouldn't have worked for me.

Lindsey Laytner: It lit the fire underneath her chair.

Katherine Saylor: I think that's the other part of the self assessment is being honest with yourself about how you work best.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Exactly.

Katherine Saylor: So, do you need that level of structure, or do you really thrive on, you know, basically having some big project deadlines, three or four big project deadlines and six months to do it, and you figure out how to get it done each and every day. That's a tough thing to figure out as well, but again, worth it. Absolutely worth the time.

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah. And, and I think also knowing whether or not you want to work with people or not. Cause there are lots of different options. If you don't like working with people, good to get that out of the way or vice versa.

Heidi Bolduc: Yeah, I was gonna say, or you need to kind of sit down and, and figure out, "Am I the type of person that wants to be like in a lab, like hands-on doing things all day? Or behind the scenes and like writing up the lab reports or writing up the journal articles?"

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yep, that's a great question.

Katherine Sayler: And I think that can change over time. I mean, I've graduated six years ago with my PhD. I had to think about it. And for me at the very beginning, I was so obsessed with the lab. You could not carry me out of there, you know, with an army. That's why I didn't even, I was fearful of being a PI because I, didn't want to lose the lab.

I didn't want to forget , you know, I wanted to be in the lab all day, every day. And that changed over time, which is surprising. So I think you just have to meet yourself where you are in the self assessment, meet yourself where you are in that moment, essentially when you're doing your job search, either starting it for the very first time or restarting it because you're ready to transition into a new role.

Lindsey Laytner: That's huge. It's something that's not just set in stone. You can kind of go back to it over and over again and keep modifying. And, you know, I forget the statistic, but I think it's something like 16 jobs in a person's lifetime.

Katherine Sayler: That was millennials?

Lindsey Laytner: I could be wrong on that. But like, yeah, like 16 jobs, that's crazy!

But you change.

Katherine Sayler: You do. I think, I thought it was millennials had 23 jobs in a lifetime and baby boomers had two jobs in a lifetime.

Lindsey Laytner: Dang. So, yeah, that's even higher than I thought it was. Okay.

Heidi Bolduc: Wow, that's crazy. That's really crazy.

Katherine Sayler: I think I've already had 11, so...

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah, I was about to say, I'm pretty much up there and I know that I'm nowhere near, you know, the amount that I'm probably going to have in my lifetime.

So that's fine, but...

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's all right. Well, that's a part of your self assessment. Just embrace it. Just like a part of mine is to never apply for a job again. So, so far it's working out.

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah, I mean, I think that's huge. And I think having mentors too, and having people that you can talk to, whether it is a mentor, whether it's a previous instructor, friend, family member, but having, some kind of dialogue, like who am I, what do I want? I like this. I don't like this because...

Karoun H. Bagamian: Also, they could also bring you back to your truth. You're like, "Are you sure you like this? Remember when you were doing that and how upset you were?" Yeah. External opinion helps with that, I think.

Lindsey Laytner: I see you going down the same road yet again. Just a different job.

Katherine Sayler: Helps to keep you honest for sure.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah, definitely.

Lindsey Laytner: Definitely the self assessment is something that you can keep revisiting.

And then, the next stage is really going to be that career exploration, the occupational research, if you will, where you're actually going to start to put those characteristics, those things that you nailed down as your baseline. I need to have this moving forward in my career. Starting to put together what jobs are out there that match some of those characteristics.

I would say write down those two to three big characteristics across what skills you really like using that you have, what do you want to develop and then what are those activities that you enjoy or those, kind of extra things that you might want out of a job, like the culture aspects, things like that. And having those when you're starting to do your research, which will probably likely involve talking again to those same mentors, family members, you know, anyone that you can get your hands on that, like, does anything relatively, like, along those lines.

But I think that that kind of helps set the stage for narrowing down because there's lots of jobs. You want to find something that fits.... a few things that fit.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. Because it's pretty competitive. You know, really spreading your wings, and I I've said this to people, too, about that aspect, which is, if something's really appealing to you about it, it's worth trying, and it's worth applying for or worth checking out. Because I know, especially when I was younger, I was a very loyal person. Or like, well, if I apply, , and it works out, I'm going to have to do it.

And it's like, no, you know, you can try a lot of different things and kind of explore what's out there. So depending on where you are in that kind of continuum, and it's good to explore and keep an open mind about that.

Katherine Sayler: For sure. I know for government jobs, we always say, and I was talking to someone about this last night, 'Apply and forget', 'Apply and forget', because the competition is fierce. There's so many people that apply. A lot of government jobs, but this is for the federal government in particular, they cap, I mean, in STEM it's slightly different, but not so dramatically different. They cap it at the first 50 applicants or the first 50 applicants with veterans preference. So you have to read very, very carefully.

But, you know, if you put all of your eggs in one basket and say, "This is the job I want, and I'm not going to apply for anything else", you might find yourself in, you could get lucky and that would be awesome, but you could find yourself in a tough position so apply for anything you're interested in that you can really truly see yourself doing after you do your self assessment, then you can interview them to see if that's really somewhere where you want to be and you can always pass.

You know, I used to have that same sort of thing with loyalty and thinking like, "Oh, people think less of me if I pass on a job," but that's not really the case.

You know, they're not so concerned about you passing on a job. They're most concerned about finding the right person, the right fit for the job. So it's better that you not take a job that's not a good fit, then take something and be stuck. So, 'Apply and forget', that's my motto for sure.

Karoun H. Bagamian: I like that one.

Lindsey Laytner: I like that motto, I think that's huge because I can imagine from my minimal experience with government work, lots of people and not enough time, not enough resources to get through the gambit. Right?

But I think another thing that's really important with the occupational research side of things is to really start to reach out to people, whether it's through LinkedIn or through colleagues, previous colleagues or mentors or professors or whatever, you know- reach out to everybody! Tell them what you're interested in doing. Tell them, " I like this. I'm not really sure. Do you have any ideas and can you introduce me to someone so I can talk to them? I can learn a little bit about the job?"

And I will say I was very nervous about just cold reaching out to people through LinkedIn, but it is crazy how many people actually respond and they want to talk to you. They don't want to talk to you for very long. Don't expect, like, a 30 minute convo, but like 10, 15 minutes. " Hey, yeah, I like my job." Or, "I hate my job... you really shouldn't do this." It's misery for you. And I'm like, "Oh, shit! All right..."

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's awesome that they're honest. That's great. I like that. That's always something that I think is super helpful to, you know, go get from people.

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah. And I think most people are flattered, like that you would even consider reaching out to them and wanting their opinion, you know... So do it, you know, we have all these tools, so reach out to everybody, even if it's on Facebook, Hey.

Katherine Saylor: Worst case scenario, you're just, you're just going to get ignored. Which, you know, that's fine. That's okay.

Lindsey Laytner: Write it, forget it. This is the motto, Katherine, that we're just going to use from here on out. Don't take it personally. Just keep moving

forward. You know what you want. You've done the work. You've done that self assessment. So, just keep plugging into it.

Heidi Bolduc: And I love that idea, too. Cause the thing is, like, there's so many ways that we communicate nowadays with each other that you almost have to have that, Oh, send out a quick message and then forget about it mentality. Because then when they, if someone does respond, it's like, "Oh, wow! Okay! Yeah. You're responding. Okay. Awesome. Let's meet up, and glad to see you're interested. "

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. It's a happy surprise instead of being like so worried about it if you cast a wider net and just don't think about it. And then when it pops up, you're like, Oh, awesome. You know, instead of being like, you know, watching it and be like, are they responding. are they responding?

Lindsey Laytner: A hundred percent. There was one instance where I reached out to someone that I worked with when I was working for the state who started another job in industry.

And, you know, I reached out to her because she was in industry to chat for like 10 minutes. Anyway, we ended up chatting for almost 45 minutes, and she ended up introducing me to a couple of people.

It ended up not being a good fit for me. Yeah. But, It's that one little, like, I just was like, "Hey, you know, I just want to learn a little bit more about what you're doing with X company." "Oh yeah, sure. Let's hop on a call." And then suddenly it was like, let's talk to all these other people and then let's get you an interview. Like then I was in an interview and then I was like, "I don't want this job. This sounds terrible." But, you know what I mean? And so, you just, you never know where that's going to kind of snowball and it's worth a shot.

And I think it's actually like really beneficial to reach out to people and let them know that, you like what they do, or you like the company that they're working for. Are they willing to help, maybe after you've kind of rubbed them the right way? Like, you know, so.

Katherine Sayler: Yeah, don't be afraid to ask. I think that's kind of what it boils down to. Especially people like you said, Lindsey, somebody you worked with in a previous position, they moved on to a different position, but they still may have some connections or insights or ...

That happened to me in the laboratory as well. Somebody came to interview for a job. They ended up not taking the job, took a job at a different company. And I mean, I still, I still talk to him. And when there's openings where he works, which is a private biotech firm, like, "Oh, are you interested in this or know anybody who's interested in this?" That's just a nice resource to have as keeping that connection going, but not being afraid to ask when even if somebody comes to interview where you work, oh, why are you interested in that job? And if you have a genuine connection, then that can continue forward. Which is kind of cool.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah, it is cool. Awesome.

Lindsey Laytner: I think it's just huge and it doesn't hurt, right? And then you have, like, you've widened your network, which

Katherine Saylor: Sure.

Lindsey Laytner: You know, we know is like super important.

Cool. Yeah, so the next stage we mentioned way early on is about goal setting. So I do want to touch upon that real quick. Because I think that that's something that, I know for me, I do all the time, but I tend to be very, like, goal oriented in terms of always thinking about big picture, big picture, big picture.

But I think for some people, you might not be thinking that far out. Or you may be thinking too far out and not thinking about, like, next year. Which is my problem. I have a very big problem, and I get told this all the time. Kevin's always telling me, my partner, "You need to think about, you know, the next year, two years, not like, 40 years down the line." But that's where my brain goes. Like I'm very big picture with that type of stuff.

It's hard, doing the dirty work, right? To write down some of those goals. I don't know about you guys, how you guys have kind of formulated your short term, long term, interim goals.

I think it's important to kind of have that trajectory in line. After you've assessed yourself and you started to look at the jobs and you're like, "I really want to do this," but you may not be able to do that job just yet. You may have to take baby steps to get there. Which we will talk a little bit about, just how important it is to be realistic, too, because I think, you come out with, like, a very warped sense, especially as a millennial now, whatever it is, Gen Z, Gen X, whatever we are

like, yeah, everybody has weird expectations of what a job is, what they're going to do, and how much they're going to get paid. And it's freaking insane.

It's like, "Yo, I get it. But, let's simmer down now. Obviously, have respect for yourself and be confident, but understand that it's going to be as much hard work as it was getting your PhD, getting your dissertation done. So you've done that, you're accomplished. We know you can do stuff, we know you can learn. But now, you know, you're going to have to like work your way up in a way.

And I don't think a lot of people recognize that. Cause I know, I don't think I did when I came out, I thought, "The jobs will just probably be lining up. They're going to need someone like me." And then they're like, "No, there's so many of you. We don't care." Like, you know, "Are you willing to take zero dollars?"

Karoun H. Bagamian: Well, in a way, I'm glad that you had a more positive outlook because a lot of people feel really disheartened when they're done. Yeah, maybe, you had farther to fall. But I love that you thought that way, Lindsey. That's really great.

Katherine Saylor: I do think that a lot of people, you get out with your PhD, not a lot of people, some folks get out and they think like, okay, I have a PhD. That means I'm going to basically be like the director of operations for this biotech company, supervise, supervise 150 people, you know.

Lindsey Laytner: I've done zero of that, but like, I'm going to do it now.

Katherine Saylor: Make my 600,000 dollars a year. And it's just going to be incredible. And that's just not the reality of the situation when you, when you graduate, you have to take that first step. I'm not saying, you know, take a 12 an hour lab tech job, start from the very beginning, but it's something more kind of tempered with reality and the experience you have.

And you do have experience supervising people when you're especially, well in, in wildlife as a postdoc, you have to supervise your field crews. I think for a lot of PhDs also you're supervising either undergrads or less senior graduate students. Yeah, so you do have that supervisory experience, but it's not running a company. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, yeah, it's about being realistic.

Lindsey Laytner: Money on the line.

Katherine Saylor: Yeah, I mean, that's more like being a PI of a really large lab at an R1 institution, right? Where you're pulling in the money and making sure everyone is getting paid and everyone is dependent on you to get paid.

So yeah, being realistic about what that first position is going to look like, while, as you said, respecting yourself and feeling confident.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Exactly. Yeah.

Katherine Saylor: Just knowing where you fall, essentially.

Karoun H. Bagamian: Yeah. I think that's great advice that you guys just gave. Cause I think that's true. I do feel like I think it is sometimes people are so negative about it. And I guess I, I didn't know that many that were so positive about it, too. You gotta be somewhere in the middle, right? To figure out what's really gonna work for you.

Katherine Saylor: Yeah, I think unless you have an incredibly rare, super sought after skill, and by that I mean, like, you're very, very, very rare. Yep. Bioinformatician. That's what I was going to say.

Lindsey Laytner: Machine learning, like a robot guru, yes.

Katherine Saylor: Or some aspects of physics that is incredibly unique and incredibly rare.

Karoun H. Bagamian: And applicable.

Katherine Saylor: And there's just not very many people graduating with that very, very, very specific area of knowledge and expertise, but.. Not to discourage, because a science PhD is still valuable. But like you said, Lindsey. You know, you get out and you think I'm the only one. Well, you're not the only one with skills.

Lindsey Laytner: Unfortunately, there's, there's, there's many, many, many. And it's, yeah, even, I mean, it's obviously way harder to get like professorship, but like, even when you're thinking, " Okay, well I'm going to go and work for a pharmaceutical company and, yeah, it'll be easy. I'll just apply. And I'm gonna have a PhD and like, boom, I'm going to get that.

And it's like, no, you're not. You have no experience, what do you know, really, and truly . So I think having that understanding that, okay, I finished this one step, I'm going to keep climbing that ladder, you know, I'm not going to just jump to the top, because it's not going to happen .

Heidi Bolduc: Yeah, the way I always put it towards, because I'm like a technical trainer, so the people I train, you know, they have a lot of that mentality of like, "Okay, I accepted this job, but it's not really where I want to be like a year from now."

And the way I put it is, "Well, just start the job you have and prove yourself, you know, prove they are a hard worker, prove that you're willing to take on extra projects. And then your supervisors and your managers will see that. And hopefully you'll get where you want to be in like a year or two years, you know."

Lindsey Laytner: Yeah, a thousand percent.

Karoun H. Bagamian: That's really good advice. I always say that to people, too. everything you do, you're going to learn something from it.

It's going to be helpful to you, you know? And that's, that's on you if if you're going to be hating on where you are, if you hate it so much and you shouldn't be doing it, but like, or you make the best of it and figure out how it fits in for you if it's not exactly what you wanted.

I feel like, it's always from the most unexpected places you get fulfillment and sometimes even jobs that you never thought would or, you know, in my case, I know that, or like having experiences with management or facilities that aren't the best and you learn not what not to do. You learn something from whatever you do.

And I think that's important to keep in mind. And also, like you said, to temper your expectations, but, still be going for what you want, you know? So like, it's a it's an interesting mix, right? So, yeah.

Lindsey Laytner: I think so too. I think it's invaluable. Everything that you do, you're going to learn something and to keep that in mind, like, "What am I learning from this?"

You know, because there are so many, I mean, that's just more skills that you have in your toolkit. That's just more things that you can market yourself. I

think about some of the work that I'm doing now and it's all things that I've done through different jobs. I mean, I've had training in it, you know, like it's, ...training only gets you so far, like that's your baseline. You need to have some portfolio of, experience.

And so it's just crazy. Cause it's like, yeah, you don't realize that at the time you're like thinking, "Oh, well, you know, it's fun or it's, you know, something I'm like doing." And then next thing, you know it snowballs into something else that's more growth.

Well, I think we have had a great conversation about this topic - so just to recap, we covered a few important tips for your career development and job search - remember to take time to do the deep dive into your self assessment and learn who you are and what you want in your career, then conduct your occupational research to find those jobs that match your interests and lifestyle, and last practice goal setting - decide what you want to learn or develop and how you want to progress in your career in both the short and longterm. We hope those of you listening to this podcast find these tips helpful and we can't wait to cover the next portion of the career transition - preparing your resume, interviewing like a boss, and landing the job - in our next episode!

And I just want to thank our visiting guest host, Katherine Saylor again Thank you so much for joining us on this podcast because your insights were extremely valuable. We wouldn't have gotten half of the content if it wasn't for you. Thank you so much.

For more information on our guests and access to career development resources, please click on the link to our website below. And remember, you can also visit the website to learn more about how Bagamian Sci can help you do science.