

Guest Editorial: Go with the Flojo

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The times, dear reader, the *times*. They're rotting fabulously, callous to anyone's safety and ravaging even the faintest sense of optimism. You've more than likely been asked to sacrifice your physical health for a semester of teaching while facing a dismal, impenetrable job market.

I'm referencing the regular job market, not the academic one, which we will just ignore.

My message is actually positive. First of all, there's a lot of great advice out there already on the ins and outs of finding a job outside academia. The ship has been sinking for some time, but the lifeboats are multiplying and many have landed ashore with strong prospects. The Titanic this is not. And while many would describe the current job market just as I have, when you compare it to the odds involved in a tenure-track pursuit, suddenly you're swimming in possibility.

For me, even without the weight of a global pandemic blanketed in fascism, it was a bit of a tough road at first. However, I truly would not change a thing (it's taken me a long time to feel that way, trust me). The short version: I completed my PhD in 2013, taught for a year, had a postdoc for two more years and then started considering alternatives. I was tired of moving around and crying before Skype interviews. I was also suspicious that there was more out there, if I was just willing to jump.

And jump I did. I taught Spanish at a private high school for two years, worked as a copywriter at two marketing agencies, and then started my own freelance marketing business at the start of this year (yes, this year, of all years).

When I was searching, I found some of the resources to be a little ambiguous. And the tone of it all has trended toward "relentlessly apocalyptic" even pre-2016. So late last year, my friend Rebecca Kaplan and I started a podcast, "PostDoctoral," where we broke down all the typical advice and what you really need to *do* to land a nonacademic job. I got too busy to continue after Season 1, but she's still putting out excellent episodes you can listen to on all your favorite platforms (Shameless plug? You bet!)

Assuming you heed all the traditional advice we cover on the podcast (do your informational interviews, write a resume, focus on skills, network, etc.), I have but one additional recommendation:

Do not at any point give up on yourself.

You are absolutely ready to conquer any number of jobs out there. There is a short period of adjustment where you won't recognize some words or know

where the break room is. This is something that your prospective employer will worry about. No matter the industry, they will consider it a fast-paced environment with no room for novices. Practice calmly speaking to this point with confidence: You are coming to the job knowing that you will have to work harder in the beginning to learn the industry, but you are confident that you have the core skills to carry your weight, chief among them perseverance.

I say all of this because when I look back at my own path, it was my ability to articulate confidence in myself that ultimately got me each job—and helped me be successful at it.

Let's pause here for an anecdote.

I remember visiting a professor's office hours as a master's student. I asked about my performance on a recent assignment. Judgement was swift.

"Flojo," he summarily replied.

Truth time: I didn't know what flojo meant and had to ask. I could tell I was embarrassing myself, but I no longer cared. Fine—what was so flojo about it? What did I need to do to improve?

I had entered graduate school extremely self-conscious about my level of Spanish and terrified of revealing my general idiocy to the rest of the crowd. But the more I had to prepare for my master's exam and actually earn a degree, the less I cared about looking stupid. "I can worry about how I seem, or I can do what I need to do to pass this thing," I told myself. It was a turning point—and a detachment that has come in handy time and again.

From oral defenses to client presentations, I've found that calmly processing and responding to feedback is the bread and butter of my job—and a major asset. Let's consider marketing as an example. It's all about convincing people to take action. What that means at a practical level is that you have to be able to present, and at various points defend, a compelling argument. In a business-to-business (B2B) environment, this usually also involves breaking down highly technical and/or complex ideas to make them simple to understand for the buyer.

What do you do to earn an MA, PhD, or EdD *other* than present and defend arguments? Respond and adjust to relentless (albeit constructive) criticism? And I've been out of graduate school for seven years now, so I don't know what's cool in the theory world anymore, but I'm willing to bet it's convoluted in nature and requires a lot of decoding.

You don't have to go into marketing, but you do have to embrace what you bring to the table and make it clear to the people who might hire you. And you are uniquely equipped to handle that task.

You have proven, day in and day out for the last five-plus years, that you are not afraid to have a point of view, then defend and/or modify it based on other perspectives.

This is the essence of having a useful presence in any business meeting.

You can take ideas and break them down to their essence, decoding language and advocating for new ways of thinking.

You will be there to dig in and solve problems when others back away.

You strategize the clearest ways to present information and help students grow over the course of a semester. You think critically about how to help them demonstrate their mastery of a subject.

You can craft a strategic plan and properly benchmark progress.

You know a language that most of the country speaks yet is sorely lacking in a lot of professional spaces.

(Mic drop.)

Forget what anyone thinks or how your journey “seems” as it unwinds. I had to switch careers a few times before I found what really made me happy. My impulse at every pivot was to worry about how it looked. It’s only natural, but you have to set that worry aside and look within. I’ve been smirked at, severely doubted, and called crazy. But you know what I’ve always had? A job.

Please head out and let them know what you’re capable of. Some jobs might be right for you, some might not. All will pay better—and reward your (probably phenomenal) effort with things like raises. You must, and you will, champion yourself until somebody gets it and makes you an offer. And when that time comes, know that you are only at the beginning of what you can accomplish.