

An occasional column, in which Mole and other characters share their views on various aspects of life-science research. Correspondence for Mole and his friends can be sent to mole@biologists.com, and may be published in forthcoming issues.

Letting go – Mole replies

Editor's comment: In this episode, Mole's semi-long-lost letter in response to Molette's letter, "Letting go" (<http://jcs.biologists.org/content/124/8/1175.full>), arrives.

Dear Molette,
Congratulations on your move. I know that it is a time for chaos and uncertainty, but also a time to reflect on where you are going and where you've been! And yes, I think you've got it just right – finding a way to let go is so important for moving forward.

These days, we often require our trainees to publish before they can leave, something that not only helps us (the mentors) but also provides some confidence that the career path is well underway. But we also know that publishing can take an awfully long time. Indeed, I've often said that the job of the reviewers and editors is to convert our lovely paper, of which we are so proud, into what we now refer to as "that frickin' paper" (fill in your own choice expletive). Meanwhile, as the Bard has noted, "Time...time...time".

And then there is the move, and all the horrors that moving entails. Not only packing, traveling, unpacking, not unpacking (I still have many unopened boxes from my last move six years ago – I guess they're all set if I move again), but also the uncertainty. How will things go? Will I like it here? Did I make the right choice? It can be daunting.

Most of all, on the theme of 'letting go', is this: in your last place, everyone knew you. Even successful scientists who you look up to would greet you in the hallway, value your insights, value your work (!), and generally come to value YOU. Newbies looked up to you, and you were important to the efforts in your home lab, in your department, and in your institution. Often we mistake this for independence, and we try to hang on. This doesn't stop with graduate school – it happens at every level of our careers.

But, as we've discussed before, we're vagrants. Travelers. Many of us move a lot. Some of us have personal reasons that keep us close to a place, and if we do that, we risk giving up opportunities and yes, the possibility that we can have our own labs. Some of us don't mind that, but many of us keep our goals ahead of anything else. If you can do that, you have the best chance of success. Me? My home is my research, wherever that takes me. It may not be much, but hey, it's home.

Let's have a long-distance martini together tonight. As Buckaroo Banzai memorably said, "Wherever you go, there you are!"

Love,

Mole

Molette

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