What Do You Do When "They" Don't Want "You" Anymore?

Presenters:

Carole Barone - moderator, Associate Vice Chancellor for Information Technology, University of California, Davis

David J. Ernst, Executive Director, ITS, California State University System Office

Ann Stunden, Director of Academic Technology Services, Cornell University

This session focused on how, as professionals, we face the situation of not being the right person in the position we are in any more, what steps we should take to prepare ourselves for such an eventuality, and what to do when the such a situation occurs. David and Ann have both left positions and moved to new ones recently. Both shared some of their insights as a result of these experiences.

Carole asked questions that Dave and Ann answered. A key question was "What mistakes have you made that have negatively impacted your job?" Both panelists indicated that they did not read signs well, in effect, they protected themselves from bad news, news that had they been willing to hear, they might have used to change their strategies, or if they were not willing to do that, perhaps the news could have led them to initiate serious job searches earlier. Both panelists also offered some frank assessments of how their performance may not have fit in with the styles of the leadership in their institutions.

David and Ann both talked about the need to keep your résumé up-to-date, to build a network of colleagues around the country who understand about the work you do and who will provide you intellectual and emotional support when and if you face a career crisis, and to be routinely responsible for your own professional development, both management and technical.

The panelists and the moderator talked about how many senior jobs these days are filled based on the network of colleagues that we have put in place. Thus, important preparation for moving on in your career — either because you want to or because you must — is the building of a national (or international) network of professional colleagues who know you, know of your work and are willing to refer you to their colleagues who are looking for candidates.

The panelists stressed that this kind of professional upheaval is not a time for assigning blame, but rather a time for taking personal responsibility, reviewing how you may have contributed to the situation you are in and determining what actions you need to take to move on.
Both Ann and Dave talked about the need to maintain a respectful relationship with the organization that you are leaving. While leaving may be a traumatic time for you, it is also a traumatic time for the staff who are staying. The folks in the organization who care about you are staying there, and need your acknowledgement that the organization is a fine place and that the work being done is solid. While publicly you can be sad about leaving, being mad publicly is hard on the people staying behind. Neither does being publicly mad serve you well as you are seeking a new position.

Dave pointed out the need to be concerned about what you need from the employer you are leaving and to not hesitate to negotiate a good severance package. You may or may not be successful, but you won't know until you do it.

In summary, Carole pointed out that many of us are leaving our current positions because we are (or think we may be) asked to and many or us are leaving because we want to. In either case, to enhance our careers, we need to continually take responsibility for our professional development and for building a network so that we are prepared for a job search and for any new position that we might take.

(submitted by Ann Stunden)