



# ***The Importance of Managing Expectations and Tailored Communications to Achieving a Successful Career***

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# The Elephant in the Room...



Elephant In The Room Vectors by Vecteezy

- Rapidly changing national policies, agency reorganizations, budget forecasts, public and private priorities in all areas related to STEM producing instability in the job market
- What does this mean to us as a field and to each of us personally?

*Each of us may be feeling uncertain, frustrated, apprehensive, hopeless*

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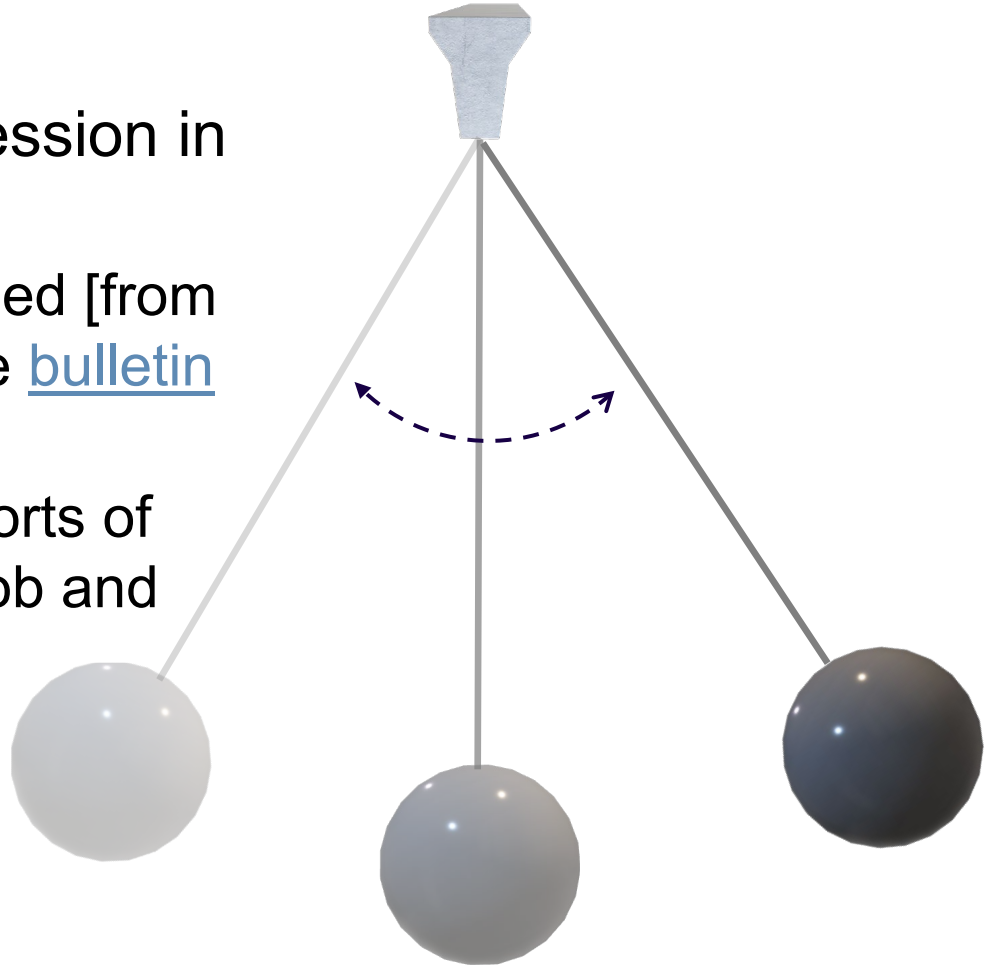


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~~ARE~~  
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# Historical Perspective...

- Conditions vary like a pendulum
- 1980's post recession, intermittent depression in job availability in engineering
  - 1985-1986: overall starting salaries declined [from Collegiate Employment Research Institute [bulletin no. 2, 1987](#)]
  - While looking at colleges, I saw news reports of graduates taking over a year to find first job and others leaving field.

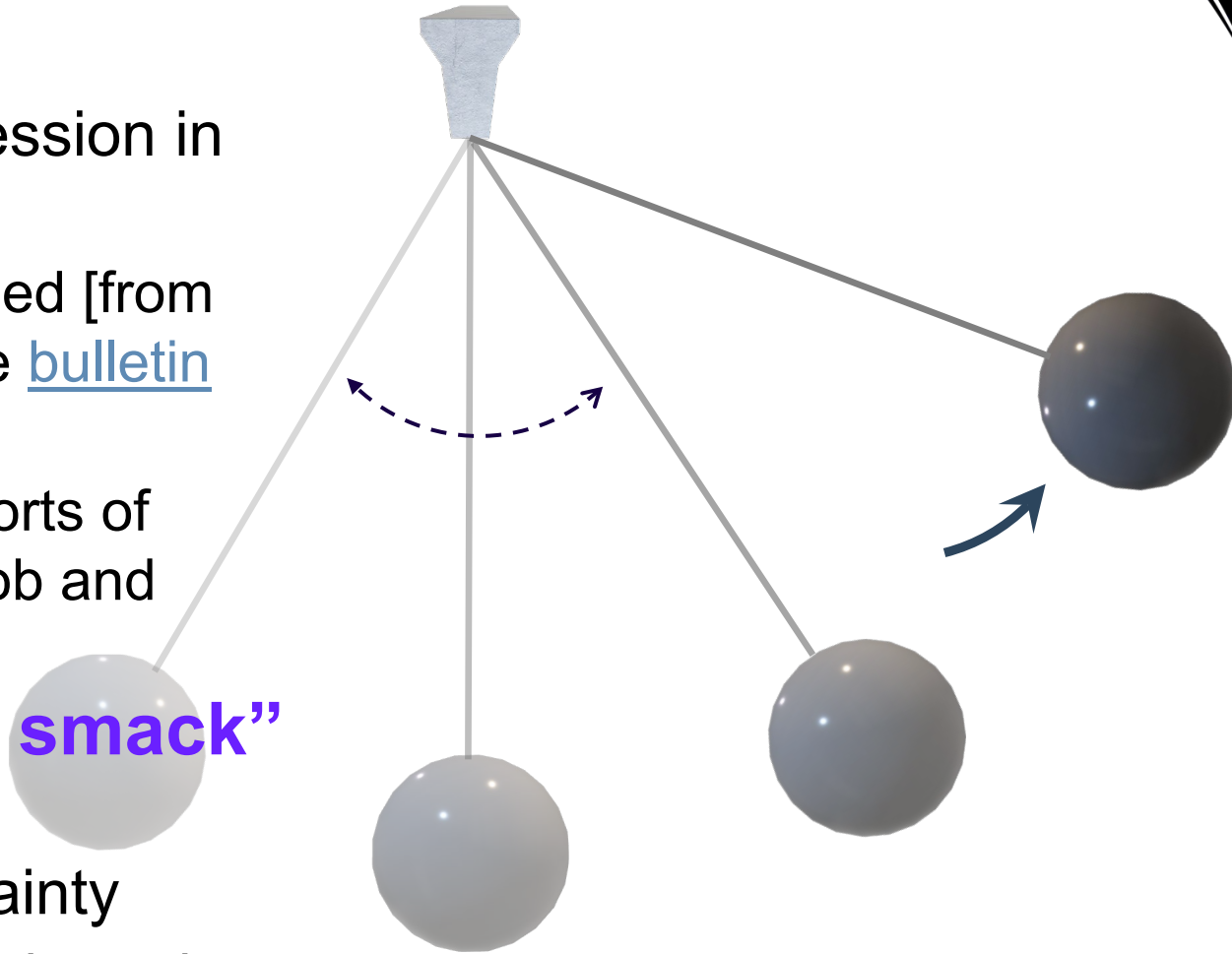


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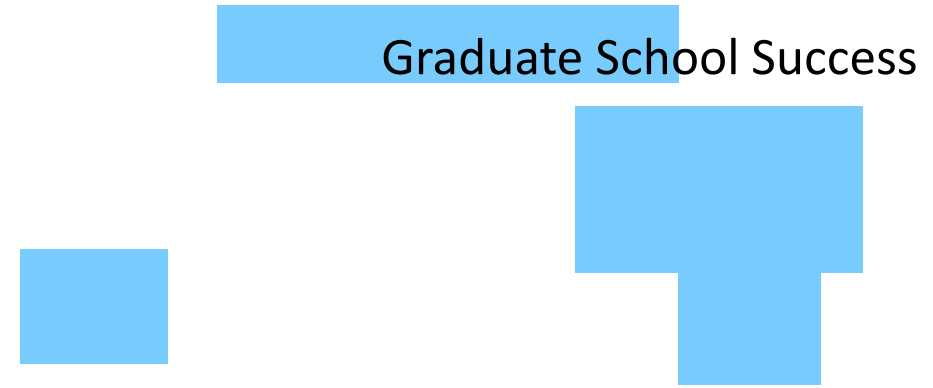
**The pendulum has been given “a smack”**

- Our field is now in a period of job uncertainty
  - Jobs exist but the type available in our field may be changing



# The Good News!

- You survived graduate school!
- You are an expert in your specific topic!
- You have gained critical skills!



Adapted figure

# The Bad News!

Now you get to:

- Apply ***ALL*** of your practical skills in an even tougher environment!
- Develop and practice new communication skills



Adapted figure



# “Successful” Career Paths



Graduate School



Post-Doc



Co-I  
Proposal Wins

PI

Establish Research  
Program

Tenure

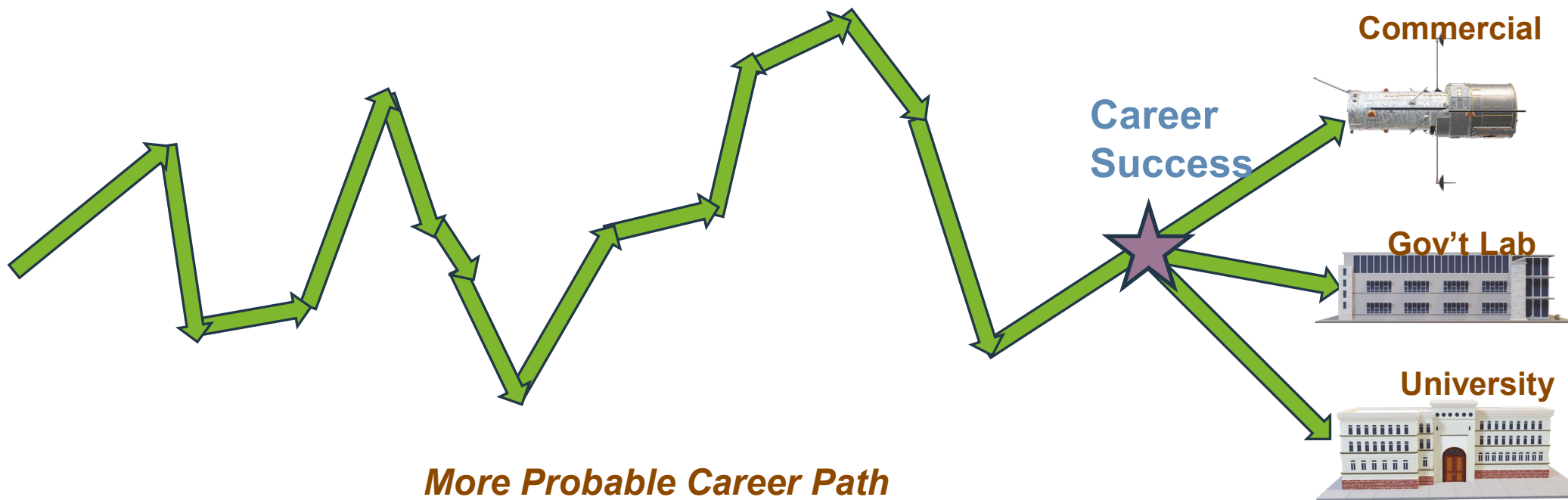


University



*The Traditional Career Path*

Graduate School



*More Probable Career Path*



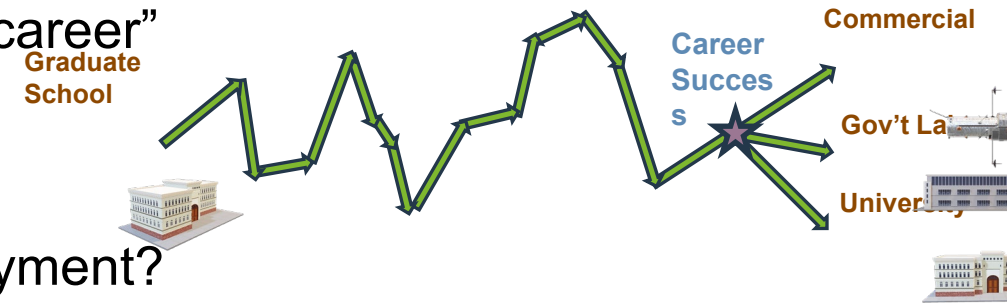
# Tips for Managing Career Expectations

*Expected Career Path*  $\neq$  *Actual Career Path*



**Mismatch between reality and expectations can lead to feelings of disappointment, frustration, failure.**

- Define your personal "success" (e.g., tenure, paradigm shifting theory, 100 1<sup>st</sup> author papers, ensuring resiliency to space weather, enabling human spaceflight, etc.)
  - Be open to redefining the meaning of a "Ph.D or science career"
  - Expect definition to change with time
- Periodic assessment
  - Can you achieve your personal success at current employment?
  - Along the path to success, will your current employment:
    - Provide skill(s) useful to your career (technical vs. soft)
    - Move you towards your goal [range from a direct step to remaining in the general subject area]
- Match success to workplace expectations



# Tailored Communication as a Priority



- Key skill for a successful career!
- Benefits:
  - Enables efficient use of time
  - Supports interpersonal connections
- All types of communication are important
  - Presentations
  - Meetings
  - Emails
- Important to develop specific communication techniques for different purposes and audiences
- Define and understand the needs of the audience. In a discussion:
  - Scientific: Provide sufficient details, avoid repetition of generally known facts
  - Technical: Emphasize facts and benefits
  - General: Emphasize excitement, minimize jargon
- Determine minimum and maximum success of a communication “event”
  - Develop presentations and agenda towards minimum success threshold



Image by tohamina on Freepik



# General Tips

- Not required to say everything about a topic. Brevity is your friend
- Emails:
  - Avoid long emails. If required, consider a phone call instead
  - Start with a BLUF statement. BLUF: Bottom-Line Up Front
- Presentations:
  - Decide on 1-2 points you want the audience to remember
    - Only slides and information supporting those points should be included
  - Avoid excessive text and sentences
  - Limit the number of slides. ~2 min per slide excluding title and conclusion slides

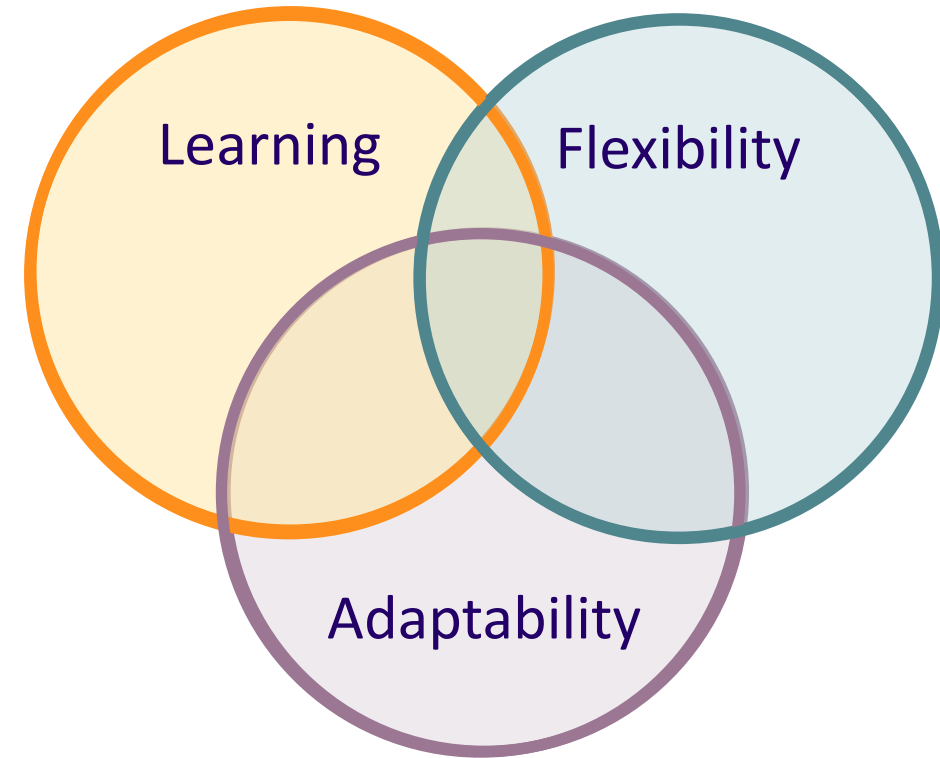
- Conversation/Discussions:
  - Answer the question asked.
  - Keep it as simple as possible
  - Constrain to relevant details
  - Silence is acceptable

*There are three things you must always ask yourself before you say anything.  
Does this need to be said?  
Does this need to be said by me?  
Does this need to be said by me, now?  
-- Craig Ferguson*

# Final Thoughts

- Look to interdisciplinary teaming
- Translate research to application needs
- Connect with peers & mentors – Avoid isolation

## Career Resiliency Requires...







***Thank you***