

A MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF A FAMILY PHYSICIAN

Journey between career and life traps: Reflections on academic family medicine

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June 2023 marks the 8th anniversary of my career in academic family medicine. This juncture signifies a transition from early career to mid-career, during which I have managed different roles, including teaching, clinical practice, research and other education-related roles. These roles come with defined expectations. As an academic, I am expected to perform beyond these requirements. Falling below the established job requirements can lead to what is called a 'career trap'. Simultaneously, as a person, I must balance personal thresholds, such as stresses, health conditions, relationships and family commitments. Neglecting these aspects can lead to another kind of entrapment – a 'life trap'.

My 8-year experience has taught me that being an academic is consistently challenging. It requires equilibrium across all aspects of life to maintain work–life balance, avoid burnout and achieve overall wellness.¹ One important lesson I have learnt is how to say 'no'. While saying 'yes' can symbolise determination and success, every 'yes' to one thing means 'no' to other things. For example, agreeing to an additional task at work means declining family time, leisure activities or personal freedom. Thus, it is important to manage the balance of saying 'yes' and 'no' in both career and personal life.

Another strategy to avoid career and life traps is improving work efficiency. Proficiency in management and soft skills, including time management, teamwork, communication, interpersonal abilities, problem-solving, creativity and ethics, is the key to work efficiently and reduce obstacles. Finding external support (e.g. working with an interdisciplinary team in primary care) and adopting new techniques (e.g. using artificial intelligence for academic tasks) can also augment work efficiency. Individuals can upgrade these skills on a learning-by-doing basis, making investments to bolster existing expertise and acquire new proficiencies. Therefore, lifelong learning throughout one's career and life path is crucial.

A positive mindset and psychological outlook are essential in promoting wellbeing and reducing mental health issues.² Optimism and positive thinking aid in finding good things within adversities as well as in exploring potential opportunities. However, too much positivity can conceal potential risks and problems. Optimising positive thoughts grounded in reality is thus important. Developing and maintaining a positive mindset are valuable aspects of the journey between career and life traps.

This reflective article presents my personal viewpoints of my career in academic family medicine. Career and personal life should be balanced between job requirements and personal thresholds (Figure 1). Preserving work–life balance, embracing lifelong learning and fostering a positive mindset are some strategies helpful in avoiding potential career and life traps.

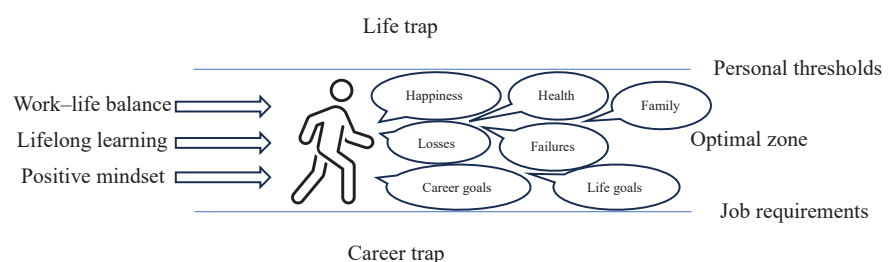


Figure 1. Journey between career and life traps.

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