

When It's Time to Move On

Joseph Rios, Tau Delta Phi Fraternity

In 2011, after thirteen years of working in student affairs, I resigned from my position as an Associate Director to start a doctoral program in higher education. Earning a doctorate was my dream for years, and it took me far too long to make the decision to pursue it. The factors that impacted my decisions are similar to those others face. This last career change reminded me how important it is to know when to move on during our professional careers, for new and experienced professionals alike.

Ask yourself the tough questions.

"What are my goals? Am I happy? Am I done learning here? What is next for me?" Too often we get lost in our jobs, both the fun and the tedious parts, so much that we do not take the time to reflect on our own goals. New professionals may not know when to start asking these questions; I suggest within the first year on the job. Experienced professionals may have additional competing priorities that keep them from honestly exploring these questions. I found asking myself these tough questions helped me write my annual review and create new goals, and I knew it was time to get a terminal degree when all my new goals required more education and training.

Confidence and skills match.

For new and experienced professionals, it may be time to think about a new position when you constantly tell yourself "I can do (job title) better." Our belief in ourselves often is the barrier for moving on to the next job, as is our ability to actually do the next job. When our confidence in ourselves matches our skills for the next job, it is time to move on. We can expedite this process by talking to mentors about how they increased their confidence and by attending professional conferences to learn new and updated skills.

The students will be okay.

Student affairs professionals are known for putting their students' development before their own. We sacrifice our evenings and weekends for programs and retreats, our lunches for check-in meetings, and our professional goals for their development. I am not suggesting students' learning is not important, but we need to know in our hearts that if we plan to move on they will be in capable hands. I have worked with many professionals who have deferred their professional goals to stay in a position. Just as we tell our students the newly elected officers can manage their chapters, so must we understand the new professional can do the job.

Evolving life goals happen.

Only a third of my master's degree school cohort have remained in student affairs. Some moved into non-profit work, some to be at-home parents, and one to become a dentist. All of them followed their hearts when they knew it was time to move on from higher education. Have faith in your own dreams, and trust your instincts when it is time to follow a new dream.