Creating a Successful Career: Guidelines and Suggestions for Recent Doctorates in Marketing

Robert F. Lusch

This article argues that the recent doctorate in marketing must create a successful career for himself–that others won't make things happen, but that the new graduate must make things happen. Suggestions and guidelines are presented for teaching, research and service.

Those newly minted doctorates in marketing who enter college or university life are more broadly knowledgeable about current research techniques and theory in marketing than most senior marketing professors. At the same time they are often quite ignorant about what it takes beyond a knowledge of marketing theory and research methods to be a success. The purpose of this article is to identify some requirements and determinants of success in academia which new marketing doctorates can use to help create for themselves a successful career. In no way is the list presented here held to be complete. On the contrary, it only represents the view of this author.

CAREERS ARE CREATED

The most important thing you must understand and accept, as a basic axiom, is that you and only you can create your career in academia. If you were seriously committed to your Ph.D. program and worked with integrity, then you have built a good foundation. You have acquired the knowledge necessary to be a success, and it is now within your power to create a successful academic career. However, you yourself must create that career. You cannot sit back and wait to get a research assistant, a six-hour teaching load or research dollars. If you are going to wait for things like that to motivate you to do research then you are in the wrong business. The same is true of your teaching and professional service activities; you must create your success and not expect or rely on others to make things happen.

Your career as a successful marketing professor requires your efforts in three areas. You must create students; you must create research; and you must create professional service. Most of the individuals attending your classes are lumps of clay that are waiting for their thought processes to be molded and shaped. As a teacher you are responsible for guiding these people in their studies–responsible for creating the students. Research is created in the sense that research problems do not define themselves; both the research problem and its solution must be devised. Finally, because the profession will not demand that you serve it, you must take the offensive and create service to the profession.

Whether it be in teaching, research or professional service you can't make things happen, you can't create, unless you possess three characteristics. First, you must have a sincere interest in being a marketing professor. Without your own interest nothing beneficial will happen to your career. While we would naturally expect a new marketing doctorate to have an interest in being a marketing professor, this is not necessarily so. People change, and marketing Ph.D.s are no exception. No matter how unpleasant it may be, all new Ph.D.s in marketing should assess the level of their interest in being a marketing professor. It may be that you

Robert F. Lusch is Associate Professor of Business Administration, College of Business Administration, at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. The author wishes to thank James A. Constantin, James M. Kenderdine, Bert C. McCammon and B. G. Schumacher for their behavior patterns and comments which shaped many of the ideas expressed in this article.

Downloaded from SHAREOK Persistent Handle URL : https://hdl.handle.net/11244/25057
from the SAGE Social Science Collections. All Rights Reserved. Downloaded from jmd.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES on January 20, 2016

would rather be an executive, a consultant or something entirely different, such as a lawyer.

Second, you can't create a successful career as a marketing professor unless you have the knowledge and are willing to renew that knowledge regularly. Your doctorate helped you acquire the necessary knowledge to be a marketing professor; however, that knowledge has a half-life of about five years. That is, within five years of receiving your degree about half of what you learned will be obsolete, irrelevant, or proved wrong. Thus to be successful you must continue to renew your knowledge. This must be a regular process, but not an all-consuming process—many professors never succeed because they are preoccupied with acquiring knowledge rather than creating knowledge.

Third, a successful career requires commitment. You must have the staying power to complete your research projects and other assigned duties in a timely fashion. When you make a mistake or error you must have the commitment to continue on, learning from your bad experience. Rejected manuscripts and poor student evaluations of your teaching should lead you to put more effort into your career rather than less. This commitment must be to state-of-the-art research and writing; to upper quartile teaching; and to a generosity of spirit in serving the marketing profession, students and society. In the following sections some specific guidelines and suggestions will be made for achieving success in teaching, research and service.

Teaching

It is easy to let teaching consume all your professional time. However, spending more time on teaching will not necessarily allow you to improve your teaching performance. Instead, you should try to take what time you have available for teaching activities and attempt to use that time efficiently. The following eight specific suggestions may help you to improve your teaching efficiency.

Teach the courses you like, or learn to like what you teach. You can always do a better and more efficient teaching job when you teach in those areas that interest you most. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. If this is the situation then you must make the best of it and try to learn to like what you teach. Try to determine how your assigned teaching area relates to your primary interests; all areas of marketing are interrelated, and you may be able to identify research opportunities while you are spending time preparing the class. In short, you must find some positive benefits from teaching a course in an area you have little interest in.

Teach those courses that you do your writing and research in. To write and conduct research in an area you must be current with the literature and on the forefront of knowledge. If you also teach in these areas then you will be able to create considerable synergy.

Teach no more than three or four different courses your first five years out of the doctoral program. Many new professors spread themselves too thin by teaching in too many areas of marketing. When you acquire your first faculty position tell the department chairperson the three or four courses you would prefer to teach. Stick with these courses and develop an outstanding set of lecture notes. Excellence in teaching comes from experience with topic matter, and this can be fostered by teaching a course on a continuing basis. Only after you have taught these courses for at least five years should you start to teach in other areas.

Develop a file for each course and place news items from the business and academic press in the file. This should be done weekly. When you get to your lectures for a particular week then you can go to that file and get current examples of new concepts and theories to explain the area you are lecturing on that week.

Don't expect to have the best preparation the first time you teach a course. There is a difference between excellence and perfection. Try to be good but not perfect in your teaching. This is especially true the first few times you teach a course. By seeking excellence rather than perfection you will leave yourself time for research and service.

Revise 15 to 20% of your lectures each semester. This is an easy way for you to keep your courses current. Take the worst 20% of your lectures each semester and revise them. If you do this regularly, then in five semesters you will have an excellent course. If you continue to do this revision regularly thereafter, your course will remain excellent.

Always be willing to meet with students, but on your own schedule. Establish office hours

Downloaded from jmd.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES on January 20, 2016

and keep them; take appointments and keep them. Otherwise, spend your time on service, research and class preparation. An open door policy will allow students to consume your days, weeks, months, years and career.

Analyze the results of student evaluations of your teaching and learn from them. If you think the evaluation instrument you use is not good, then find a better one. Using feedback from your audience helps you to become a good communicator and/or teacher. Remember: ten years of experience can mean just that, or it can mean one year's experience repeated ten times.

Research

Your research and writing will be extremely important in creating visibility external to the university. The more you help in establishing research trends, rather than merely following them, the more visible you will be and the greater will be your contribution to the marketing discipline. It is your duty as a marketing professor to constantly challenge "mainstream thinking" to be sure it is still relevant—or to discover whether it was ever relevant. If there is to be continuous progress, there must be continuous change. If a line of thought has predominated for a while, it may be time to shift. Here are some further suggestions to help you build a successful research record.

First and foremost, discipline yourself to do research. It is always easier to talk about the research you're going to do than it is to do it. Set aside certain days each week to devote to your research and writing. You cannot do research or writing in one-hour blocks; you need solid blocks of at least one day at a time.

Study in cognate fields to find concepts for adaptation to the study of marketing. Marketing has borrowed heavily from related disciplines to develop theory and this practice should and will continue. If you are to be a part of this process you must read in cognate fields.

Leverage your dissertation. Your dissertation research represents some of the most well developed research that you are likely to do in the near future. It has enabled you to become an expert in a small area of inquiry. Even though you may be bored with your dissertation you should attempt to publish a few articles from it. It will probably also be worthwhile for you to design some additional research in the same area as your dissertation since you have already identified many areas of needed research.

Build a research program. Recognition in the marketing discipline and contribution to it will occur through concentration in a small number of areas. If you do research in a series of unrelated areas, you will have no visibility in the marketplace and, even more importantly, you will not be able to design research that has a cumulative impact on theory advancement in a particular area.

Design your research program in such a way that the projects relate to each other and to the program. Each project should logically fit into the prior and the next project, and all your projects should tie to your overall research program by being in a well defined area of inquiry. This practice should continue for many years. It will result in making you well recognized and your name synonymous with research in a particular area, as is Kent Monroe with pricing research and Louis Stern with marketing channels research.

Build a research wheel. Always try to have something at each stage—conceptualization, research design and data collection, data analysis, and writing. It may take some time to get all stages in the research wheel started, but afterwards you will become quite productive. Leveraging your dissertation makes this wheel easier to set in motion.

Don't look to journals for streams of research. Many marketing professors consider the table of contents of leading marketing journals as indicative of what topics are acceptable for research or of what journal editors prefer. Avoid this practice. Once an article appears in print it may be several years old, and if you start a project in this area it may be three years before you complete it and publish it, making you even further behind those who developed the topic area first. You need to begin to know other marketing scholars in the areas you plan to do your research in and get their working papers. Try to be innovative in your research and don't wait for an area to become "hot" before you begin research in that area.

Profit from your travel to conferences. Conferences should have a pleasure element to them, but take the program content seriously as well. Look through the program, attend

Downloaded from jmd.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES on January 20, 2016

sessions, and be an active participant. Use conferences to meet scholars with similar interests and develop contacts for future research opportunities.

Be willing to spend your own resources; lack of resources is no justification for not doing research. You may need to make a front-end investment on your own behalf in terms of times, money and materials. In fact, I know of no recognized marketing scholar that does not provide some, if not a significant portion, of the resources he or she needs to conduct research.

Write with clarity. This is critical; many articles are rejected because of poor writing style. Research cannot stand on its own; to be effective it must be properly communicated to the appropriate audience. If you do not write clearly then even the best research will look unimpressive.

Properly position your articles and send them to the best outlet possible. Only send an article to a journal if it fits within the journal's editorial guidelines. Be objective about the basic quality of your article, and avoid sending it to too weak or too strong a journal. The ability to make this decision accurately will require some degree of experience and knowledge of the editorial objectives and standards of various journals. It will also require you to face facts about the quality of your own work. If you are uncertain don't hesitate to seek the counsel of senior colleagues.

Learn from reviews of your articles. When you receive negative feedback try to be objective and see the problems in your research or writing. Reviewers are more often correct than incorrect, so take the additional time to learn from their comments. Avoid making the same mistakes in future versions of the article or in your future research in general.

If you are patient there will be more good research opportunities than you can take advantage of, and you will have to discipline yourself to confine your research to areas related to your primary interests.

Service

New doctorates should in general spend less time on service than on teaching and research. In the first few years as a faculty member your best contribution can be in teaching and research. This is not to say that you should ignore professional service. This would be disastrous. But you should avoid devoting too much energy to professional service.

The new professor should give highest priority to serving his or her department, second priority to serving the college, and third priority to serving the university. You must become familiar with your departmental policies, procedures, needs, and problems before you can properly serve your college and subsequently the university. In addition, in your initial years as a professor you will be most strongly evaluated by your immediate colleagues; thus, service to them is critical.

Serve on committees but avoid chairing them for at least two years and ideally three years. You can learn a lot by listening and participating on the committee, and you will not have the necessary background information and insight to effectively chair a committee. In those first few years observe how committee chairpersons behave. You will be exposed to both good and poor ones, and you may learn how to effectively chair a committee by adopting the practices of good chairpersons you have been exposed to.

Serve your professional associations. All of our professional associations rely heavily on volunteers and your assistance is needed. At first, almost any service is worthwhile. Start with a regional association, such as the Southern Marketing Association or Western Educators Association or a local chapter of the American Marketing Association, and become involved. Service to your professional associations will help you build your visibility external to the university.

The last suggestion about professional service is learn to say no. If you do a good job you will be asked to serve on more committees and do more jobs and tasks for your department, college, university or professional association. If you accept all requests the demand on your time will be too great. Furthermore, if you don't learn to say no you will be overcommitted, and the quality of your performance in the service area is bound to decline. Overcommitment to service may also negatively affect your teaching and research productivity.

Downloaded from jmd.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES on January 20, 2016

SOME TRUTHS ABOUT RECOGNIZED MARKETING SCHOLARS

Some common truths about recognized marketing scholars may help you to get a better idea of the things you need to do if you wish to create a successful career as a marketing professor. Six truths are obvious.

Recognized marketing scholars are not free spirits. We sometimes hear stories that indicate the most visible marketing scholars lead lives which sound like those of free spirits: they take trips overseas, spend summers or weekends at their home in the mountains or by the sea, or go off consulting on some multi-million-dollar research project for a Fortune 500 firm. In point of fact, however, recognized marketing scholars are very disciplined. Systematically, they program into their daily lives time to think and do research on a continuing basis. They allow time to do both empirical research and secondary research, and most importantly they research their minds.

Quality and not quantity determines success as a marketing scholar. Recognized marketing scholars are acknowledged for only a handful of contributions, but each was of superb quality. New professors find it easy to get carried away with quantity. It certainly is important to build your resume, but you must keep in mind that you will get positive recognition only for quality work.

Most recognized marketing scholars consult, but the consulting came after the scholarly recognition. Almost all new professors are cash short, and many turn to consulting. Although it may be disheartening, you can't afford to spend your time consulting the first few years after graduating. First you must build a strong scholarly record; then you will have all the consulting you desire and at a good level of compensation.

Most recognized marketing scholars have had a mentor, or several of them, at different points in their career. To be more straightforward, most of us simply do not make it on our intellect and personality; we need someone to show us the ropes. Once you get established, it is your duty to help your younger colleagues by serving as a mentor.

Recognition as a marketing scholar requires continuity of impact over time. Many emerging marketing scholars work too hard in too short a period and then "drop out." Quality counts more than quantity, and in the long run you must lead a balanced life in order to be healthy mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Recognized marketing scholars also learn from their newer and younger colleagues and students. If your dissertation research has made you an expert in a particular area, then you can be very helpful to recognized scholars in this area. Your insights and perspective and the currency of your knowledge can be quite beneficial to them. In addition you can always learn from your younger colleagues and students. Recent graduates and graduate students can be a great source of new insights and their enthusiasm for research can be invigorating.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to offer some advice to the new doctorate on how to create a successful career in academia. Although these recommendations may not axiomatically lead you to a successful career, they should point you in the correct direction and give you a strong push toward what you should be doing.

Downloaded from jmd.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES on January 20, 2016