How to Turn a Research Career into a Success

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About me

- Professor, Technical University of Madrid, School of CS
- Director of the IMDEA Software Institute (check it!!)

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- I was asked to share my personal experience
- But, quoting Scott Adams' *Dilbert*: *"Do you want career advice from someone who has to work 80 hours per week?"*
- **Disclaimer #1:** "successful career" may have a different meaning for each of us!
- **Disclaimer #2:** I am not going to focus on research or career planning

How did I end up there?

- Mostly unplanned events
- It's difficult to plan what the world around you is going to do!
- But, in retrospective, perhaps some recurrent habits helped me to, at least, avoid wrong decisions
- But of course I cannot claim I always made the right decision

Be there

- Opportunities seldom (if ever) look for people
- It really helps trying to be in the right place
  - ▸ You never know who you will meet / what you will learn
  - ▸ And if it's at the right time, that's great
- You will of course need a lot technical proficiency
- But, at some level, many people around you will be very proficient
- Personal contact can make a real difference

Be reliable

- Deliver what you promised
- If possible, more: go "the extra mile"
- People will really notice and you will build a reputation
  (also a reputation to maintain, I am afraid...)
- And people will also remember when you did **not** deliver

Be curious

- Have knowledge outside your domain
- You will meet people with many different needs, ideas, …
- Expanding your knowledge will make it easier for you to relate to them, understand them, explain things to them

Dime con quién andas...

- "Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres"
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  (*Tell me who you hang out with and I'll tell you who you are*)
- Surround yourself with people smarter than you
- Those smarter than you will pull you upwards
- The rest will drag you to the bottom

Learn to speak in public

- Presenting your ideas in public will be key at some point
- Learn! You can take lessons
- TED Book #1 advice: "*you need to have something to tell*"
- Tell a story (if adequate)!
- Learn how to explain things to the layperson ("as if I was your grandma")
- Think thoroughly the **key points** of what you want to deliver
  - This will also help you in social media
- Abraham Lincoln: Gettysburg's address, comments on speeches

Look at the big picture

- We, as scientists / technologists tend to focus on the small details that lead to perfection
- These are of course necessary
- But everything has to fit seamlessly into a "grand scheme"
  - In aim / objectives (*is this really contributing to the ultimate goal?*
  - In mathematical / physical / technical feasibility (*will this be ever possible?*)

More disclaimers

Everyone's environment is different

Everyone's goals are different

There's hardly a book of recipes that works for everyone