

PAUL SCHERRER INSTITUT



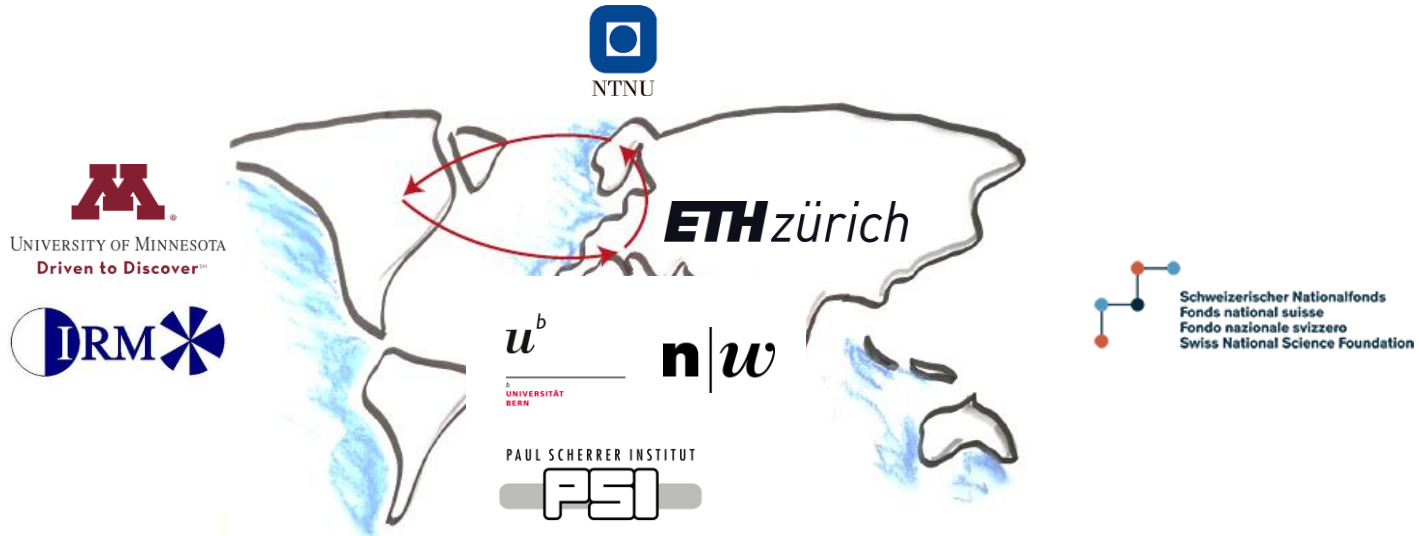
Dr. Andrea R. Biedermann :: Leader Career Center :: Paul Scherrer Institute

The inside view of a successful science career & why I turned down 800k research money to move to counseling

SPS Women in Physics Career Symposium – Sept 4th, 2023

The official story

- Since 09/2022 Leader PSI Career Center
- 11/2018 – 10/2022 SNSF professor; CAS Higher Education, CAS Coaching
- 10/2014 – 10/2018 2 postdocs
- 10/2010 – 09/2014 Scientific assistant, PhD defense 05/2014
- 10/2005 – 09/2010 BSc & MSc in Earth Sciences, Major in Geophysics



The official story



- 36 publications in international peer-reviewed journals
- 2 invited reviews
- 24 1st author
- 6 publications in community magazine



- 81 conference contributions
- 6 invited
- 39 1st author



Acquired 2.5 M CHF research funding (of which 800 k declined)



Organized 2 PhD retreats, ~20 conference sessions and short courses

The not so official story



36 publications in international peer-reviewed journals

- 2 invited reviews
- 24 1st author

6 publications in community magazine

- ... 8 of which spent ~2 years in review
- ... 3 were rejected for being out of scope or not innovative enough
- ... should have been co-author on many more

81 conference contributions

- 6 invited
- 39 1st author
- ... scheduled at 5pm on the last conference day

Acquired 2.5 M CHF research funding (of which 800 k declined)
... out of the ~10 M CHF I applied for, and with others using ideas from my rejected proposals



Organized 2 PhD retreats, ~20 conference sessions and short courses
... with little recognition

The not so official story



There were many situations when I felt incapable, overwhelmed or frustrated



Many difficult situations turned out to be great opportunities



The main lesson I learned during my 12 years in science was to get up again after falling (or being knocked over)

The crazy decision to leave science

- I could have stayed at Uni Bern, and had secured 800 k funding
- ‘We want leaders like you at our university’
- BUT: My interests changed
 - Science is great, and I am good at what I’m doing
 - Somehow I just don’t feel the same motivation and energy as before
 - There is not much else I can achieve
- I want to learn something else



The crazy decision to leave science

- Career counseling
 - Strengths and interests
 - How did I end up where I am now?
 - What do I like about my job as a professor?
 - What are the reasons I don't get excited about science anymore?
 - Is there anything else I'd rather do?
 - What am I willing to invest?
- Coaching/counseling would be interesting
 - ... I can do a CAS or MAS with any university degree



The crazy decision to leave science

- The more I learned about coaching, the more fascinated I became
 - Coaching techniques were useful in leading my group or helping students with their career planning
 - Did I want more?

- PSI was looking for someone to lead their Career Center
 - Am I willing to give up what I have now, not knowing what I am getting myself into?
 - My curiosity won

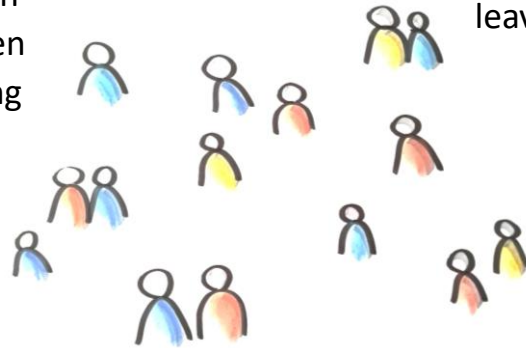


The crazy decision to leave science

- Again, people had opinions

You are inspiring the young generation – how can you even think about doing something else?

You are successful and have achieved what everyone is aiming for – you can't give up!



You are crazy, why would someone with your track record leave science?

What shall the community do without you?

You cannot leave, who will take care of the lab?



The crazy decision to leave science

- What I gave up
 - The prestige of 'Prof.' on my office door
 - 20k in yearly salary
 - The comfort of working in a familiar environment

- What I gained
 - Opportunity to learn something new
 - Walking home with the feeling of having done something meaningful
 - Meeting inspiring people and being able to support them for a while



The crazy decision to leave science

- Science background is useful
 - Understanding the situation of the clients
 - Independence, ability to handle many projects/tasks simultaneously
 - Presentation of ideas and (expected) results
- I am still facing challenges, and it still helps to get up again



The crazy decision to leave science

- People's opinions changed over time

You were always happy to lend an ear to students facing difficulties – this is the logical next step



I wish I had a job like yours!

I always knew you'd be good at counseling

I admire you for the courage to start something new



Take-away

- Find your own definition of a 'good' career
 - What makes you happy and provides meaning?
 - What do you want to achieve or learn?
- Personal expectations, interests and values may change over time
- Being good at something does not mean you have to do it
- People have opinions ... and they will get used to your choices



Wir schaffen Wissen – heute für morgen

Thank you 😊

careercenter@psi.ch

www.psi.ch/en/careercenter

