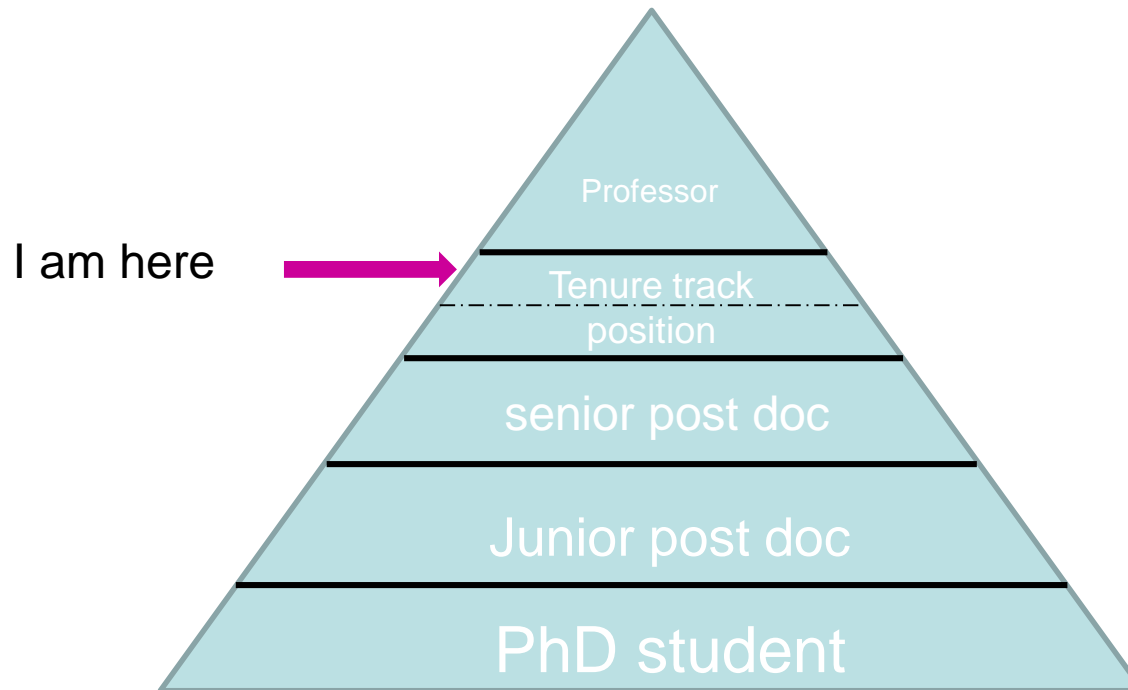


MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

Marie Cohen
Assistant Professor, UNIGE



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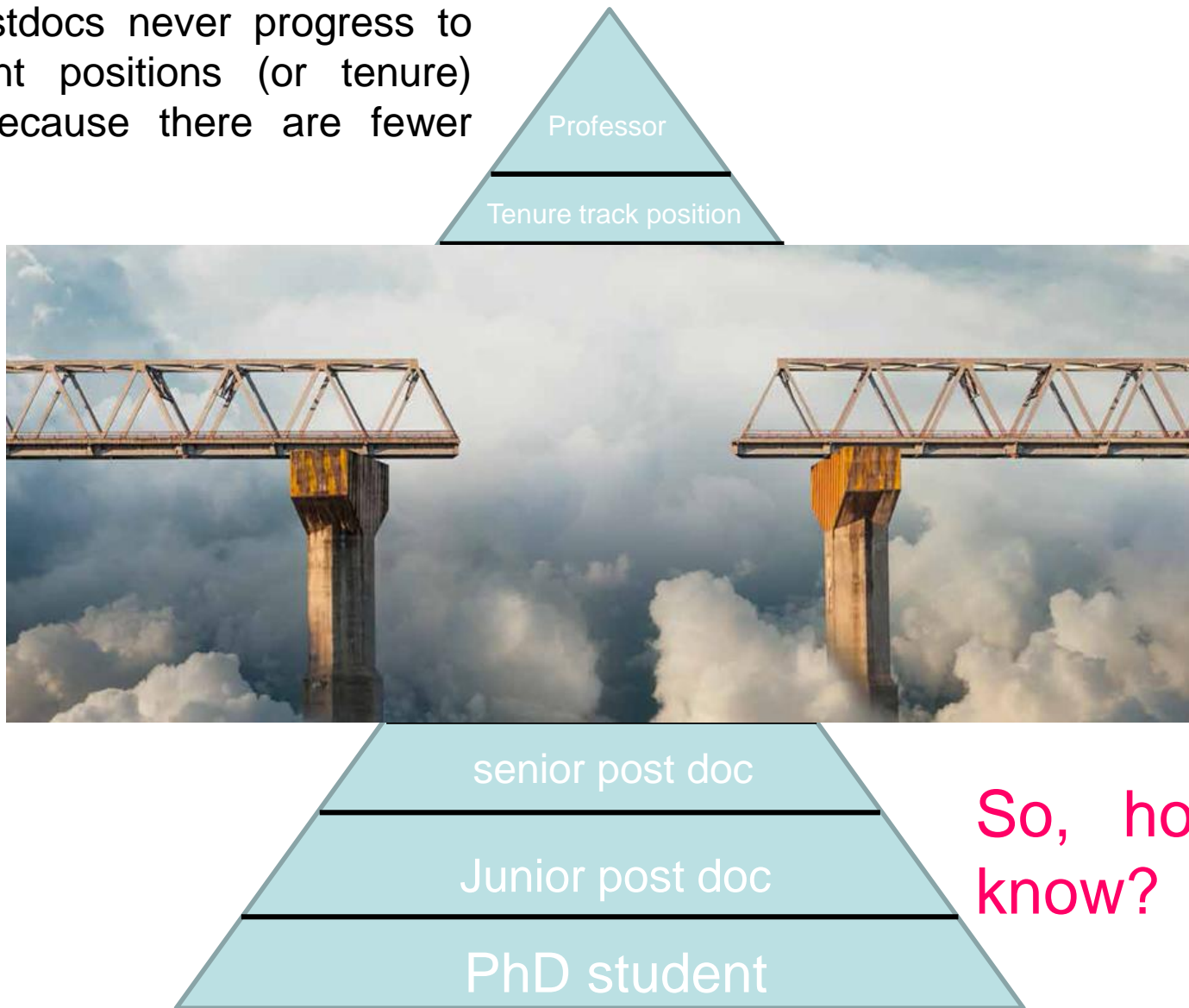


Academic career = pyramid



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Most postdocs never progress to permanent positions (or tenure) simply because there are fewer available.



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1- MOTIVATION / PASSION.

Do you ever wake up early because your work is too exciting ?

However, being smart and working hard is not enough



2- DETERMINATION. You have to **know what you're aiming for**, set yourself a target and a time frame, and make the necessary decisions to get you there.

3- NETWORK. You have to find people to work with who are interested in your long-term career, people you can learn from, and people you can trust.

Who you work with is at least as important as what you do!!!!!!



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MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE



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Even as a child, I was crazy about the life sciences



The cartoon “Once upon a time... Life” was on my wallpaper!!!



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1999: Master in Biochemistry, France

2000: DEA (master) Biotechnology and Food Industry at an engineer school, France

Nov 2003: PhD in Biochemistry, France

- ▶ teaching (more than 300 hours in 3 years), 7 research articles, research grant applications

6 months before my thesis defense, I looked for a post doctoral position in a foreign country that :

- could increase my technical competencies
- allows me to publish in high impact factor journal

I rapidly found it in Geneva. And I began my post doctoral position before defending my PhD thesis.



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But the first weeks of my post doc were a nightmare...



The scientific level of my mentor was excellent but his relationship with his colleagues was catastrophic.

It was urgent for my mental health to find a new post doc position in Geneva!!!



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Hopefully I found it, with a research project on placentation.



It was not the best place for a post doc position:

- there was only one research lab in the department (clinical department)
- the PI was at 6 years before his retirement and the lab was ageing
(few means, few people (only 2!!!!), old materials...)
- the topic and the lab were not adequate for publication in high impact factor journal
- the funding was only for two years

But I needed this position, and **I finally enjoyed it!**



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- 1/ I discovered the placenta's world.
- 2/ I met several very interesting people during congress who helped me later to advance in my career.
- 3/ I enjoyed the interaction with the clinicians of my department and developed new projects (granted by private foundations) with them in parallel of my post doc project.
- 4/ I integrated the teacher's team of Reproduction unit.
- 5/ I was so motivated by my projects that I worked more than 65h per week.

In 2009, I obtained a « Maître assistante » position from the « commission de la relève » and various grants to develop my research team: SNF, Pierre Mercier foundation, Schmidheiny etc...

Thanks to that, I was able to stay in my department after the PI left my lab in 2010.

In 2011: « boursière d'excellence » UNIGE, mentor: Pr Martine Collart, for three years.



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Every year, in agreement with my head of department, I discussed with the dean about my career in Geneva. Each time, the discussion was mainly positive. However, six months before the end of my MA position, he decided against giving me a promotion but to open a tenure track position of assistant professor in my department.



I applied for this position, but I knew that my CV was not excellent (more than 40 articles, mainly in first or last author position, but none published in Nature, Cell, or another high impact factor journal)



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Finally, I obtained this tenure track position of assistant professor thanks to the support of:

- My department
- The teaching commission
- The representative of students
- The director of equality's service
- My faculty and international collaborators who wrote support letters to the dean

And by chance!!! (only 4 applications received for this position, and none with an excellent research profile)



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MOTIVATION, HARD
WORK,
DETERMINATION,
PERSEVERANCE,
RESEARCH AND
TEACHING NETWORKS,
AND CHANCE



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And my family?

I was so focused on my research projects and my career that I could not imagine having a baby.

But in 2008, the husband's father was diagnosed with a lung cancer (stage IV)...

In June 2009, I gave birth to my daughter.

At first, it was difficult to conciliate my work and my family.

I believed that a baby only eats and sleeps, but it was not the case with mine!!!! She was crying days and nights. And despite two weeks in children hospital, we did not find out why. As a consequence, I could not work the first weeks after delivery.

When I came back to the lab, I could not spend anymore 65h per week in the lab. I had to find another way to work.

And I was exhausted. My daughter began to sleep through the night only at 5 years old...



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Thanks to:

My research team (past and present)

My local and international colleagues (Manuella, Ginette, Antonina, Begona, Florence, Philippe, Thierry, Cathy, Nadia, Salvatore, Sandra, Nicola, Jean-Christophe ...)

My heads of department (past and present)

My mentors: Paul Bischof, Martine Collart

La déléguée à l'égalité: Brigitte Mantilleri

My sponsors: FNRS, LGCC, LCC, fondation Pierre Mercier...
And many others



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