PREVENTING CAREER TRAGEDIES

*No one ever wakes up and thinks "I think I'll ruin my career today!" Rather than any one **big** mistake, it is more frequently the result of smaller missteps that lead us into deep water. Coined by C. K. Gunsalus, the acronym TRAGEDIES encompasses a range of missteps that can lead down the slippery slope and, ultimately, to career tragedy.*

Temptation

A published paper, an award, a grant…. The potential achievement of these goals can lead us to cut corners. We have all experienced temptation - that desire to achieve something so great that we bend the rules to reach the outcome. Learning to recognize those feelings will encourage you to pause before acting in the service of temptation.

Rationalization

Bending the rules includes rationalizing your reasons for doing so. A strong sign that you are attempting to rationalize an action you know is not really appropriate is when your internal monologue has turned into a debate with yourself. *"Well, I didn't know the first journal would accept my request for a rewrite, so I don't need to tell the second journal where it's also under review."*

Ambition, overconfidence

How badly do you really want to get that paper published, win that grant? Ambition fuels us to push so hard for our goals that we fail to pay attention to problematic behaviors in the process.

Group, &/or authority pressure

We like to fit in with our peers and we like to satisfy our supervisors. It is common to conform to the norms of the group or to the demands of the boss. Often this is a good thing, but sometimes it can convince you to engage in behavior you otherwise find wrong.

Entitlement

Life is not always fair, and the temptation to correct a perceived injustice on your own terms can be powerful. *"I worked harder on this project than everyone else, and I should be lead author. I deserve to take this data and write my own version of the paper with it….."*

Deception

We can obviously deceive others, and we can also lie to ourselves. *"I'll just do it this one time…."*

Incrementalism

First it's just one little data point that you can rationalize taking out. Then another. Then another… Before you know it, you are much farther away from what would be considered "appropriate" than you would ever have been willing to go in a single leap.

Embarrassment

When we do something wrong, our instinct is to hide it so we do not feel stupid or wrong. This begins a cycle that leads to further deception. If you own your mistake, you can prevent your embarrassment from derailing you.

Stupid Systems

The world is replete with stupid systems, where the design can be so flawed that simply breaking the rules is a much faster and more efficient solution. *"Local rules stipulate that reporting your parking pass as being 'lost' incurs a replacement fee. However, if you report it to the police as being 'stolen,' you can acquire a new one for free. A system like this is one that encourages false reporting, misleading information and bad behavior."*