

# Pls at the Bench

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Keep working at the bench or keep locked in the office? There are no clear regulations about this question so you may wonder about it too. In this short blog I will give no answer, but rather suggest some of my own thoughts. Please do not hesitate to add your reflections as there is not just one correct answer in real life.

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Some of the best advice for any new PI includes the truth that it is a major transition: from doing your own experiments into managing a whole lab. The multiple duties of a new PI are time-consuming. Some PIs do have a personal life, so it is not much of a choice doing what you love or just what you have to do ASAP. You must spend most of your time in the office. But most is not all. YES, you CAN find the time for anything you really want to do. Some find the wet-lab work unattractive anyhow, some keep enjoying the work at the bench, so give it a thought so you may plan ahead and not have to compromise with other duties.

My father used to tell me that if I will sit whole days my bottom will get the shape of the chair. They gave me an extra-thick foam office-chair, so I would NOT like to spend whole days sitting. Sure, I have to spend most of my time writing and managing the lab – but I keep my freedom to stand up, walk, and even stop by the bench whenever possible.

Time, yep time is an issue. Doing experiments takes time- and although we study Stem Cells there is no permission to clone myself (yet?). If you can work in the TC while talking with a few students and writing papers in your head, you must be a unicorn. For us mortals, time is a major issue. And one must also consider the change of position: students must do the wet-lab work, not the PI; let your students roam the benches and work freely w/o peeking behind their shoulders is a good argument for getting back home before dark.

In your new lab, there is usually one person who knows all the techniques best, and that is you. A junior PI usually brings cutting-edge expertise- who will teach the students better? There is no better way to learn protocols than actually doing them, together. So for the start, it is most likely best practice to keep practicing. It is fun running experiments with students; you are good at bench-work, and you probably enjoy getting things done properly. For students, working with their mentor can be a positive experience. I was fortunate to have outstanding professors that spent time at the bench, and it always made me happy to see that I was not the only one to stay late when needed. Working at the bench keeps you in good experimental shape – and updated technically. When people imagine what a professor does they most likely consider some practical experiments, not just any ordinary office-style aridity.

I do know of an outstanding professor that keeps working at the bench - probably because she is that talented (and has endless energy). OK, there are few more (not going to tell them...no worries). Hmm... looks like quite a few outstanding scientists are not keeping themselves in their office, right? Students of this energetic PI say they are most happy working with their Professor even though she is faster than most of them. On the other hand, I have heard of another PI, that when she walks to the bench all of her students get very

nervous. One PostDoc said she actually imagined that something is going to burn when she saw her PI sneaking in to do experiments. You must know how people feel about your presence in the lab, and use this information wisely.

Finally, you can do just whatever you feel like, as long as it works. You earned your position as a PI and you are entitled to have it your way. In some places it is not easy to act differently, so one must realize what others expect of you for tenure and promotion: is your institute expecting PIs to lead a large group and devote all time to writing, or is it OK to spend time at the bench and actually do experiments? Will your students feel comfortable with you working among them? Are you truly having the time and not compromising other duties that no one will do for you? Does working at the bench make you happy? I found that by answering these questions correctly I choose when I may and when I may not leave my office, and I think that also makes my students happier.