

SERVSIG Services Marketing Consortium  
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## Life as a Services Academic

Tor W. Andreassen  
Norwegian School of Management  
tor.w.andreassen@bi.no

Let me start by thanking Ray and Eileen for organizing this consortium providing us all with an opportunity to welcome the young bright minds of tomorrow into our academic field. I also want to thank Ray for inviting me to share some of my thoughts and experiences as a researcher in the field. I am grateful for the opportunity to take one step back and reflect on what it means to be a researcher.

When I first read the title of my speech “Life as a Services Academic” it reminded me of Monty Python’s movie “Life of Brian”. I hope that my academic life will have a different ending. Before I start, let me offer one warning and one disclaimer. First of all I have an European perspective. Second, I will not claim that I have been successful. I have, however, enjoyed my life as a service academic - so far!

What is our trade? What is that we do?

Several years ago one of my sons asked me: What is that you do father? Several years later I keep asking myself the same

question. As an academic what is that we do? What is that you are educating yourself to become and what will you do when you become? First of all I feel that we are not primarily driven by money, i.e. educating or qualifying us for a paid job. Personally I believe that we educate ourselves for a mission beyond just making money. So, what is it that we do?

In my mind our mission is to develop and disseminate knowledge. Nothing more! Nothing less! We are driven by a curious mind which wants to find answers to all sorts of questions we manage to construct. At the same time we are also driven by a passion to communicate what we have found to others. Given this noble mission how can we know whether we have succeeded or not? The answer lies in the very simple question: have we managed to influence how people think of, perceive or approach issues pertaining to services marketing?

The thought of being able to impact people's thinking is a very strong motivator for all the things that we do. Because most people (students, business, and society at large) perceive us as not having any other interest than finding the truth, our work puts us in a very delicate position with regard to balancing power and trust. In summary, to me life as a service academic is to be able to impact people's thinking without violating their trust.

In the following I will discuss three topics, which I see as important in being able to impact people's thinking: your education, your employment, and your private life.

### Your education

Previously, in Europe at least, obtaining a PhD was the topping of a long research project and a career that materialized with a public defence of your work. In those days a PhD was an award, and a documentation of solid research capabilities approved by ones peers. Today a PhD is an education and a documentation of the fact that you are able to utilize the tools of the trade. It is not an evidence of your research capabilities. Today a PhD has become a pre-requisite to become a researcher. As such a PhD is a ticket to play rather than a ticket to stay! This is especially true in trying economic times as today. You are all enrolled into a PhD-program. In the same way as an MBA to a large extent is dependent on where you earned it, you are the first to realize the importance of the reputation of your university and the quality of the PhD-program.

Whereas some of you are well under way, some of you have just started. For the latter group I advice you to think carefully through which courses you want to include in your portfolio. I know that there are different practices out there: from hands off to hands on, from you decide to you are being told. Personally I

invite my students to a dialog regarding which courses to take and where. Which other departments within the university are offering relevant courses? Does any other university offer relevant courses? The students are expected to have qualified opinions about this so that we can have a fruitful discussion. I always challenge my students to spend one year abroad at a leading university to study and write. By doing this they will benchmark themselves with other outstanding students plus be able to learn from them. The goal is to define the best possible portfolio of courses for the student given his/her dissertation topic. At this point I need to clarify that in Europe most PhD-students are employed by the university, i.e. they receive a monthly salary allowing them to live a “normal” life.

Whether you have just started or you are well developed I advice you find a topic for your dissertation or research area that has the potential of opening a new field and portraying you as the leading expert in that field.

In summary, the quality of your PhD-courses and your defined research area is critical to your later life.

So far I have talked about your choices (university and courses). My third point about being able to impact people’s thinking is related to how you as a student interact with others. I know working with a supervisor can be a blessing or a living hell. Given the situation you are totally dependent on this person, i.e.

he or she has power over you. From my own perspective, I cannot think of anything more productive and rewarding than working with a gifted and dedicated student. On the other hand I cannot think of anything more unproductive and de-motivating than working with an untalented student. I guess it works both ways. In order to maximize your learning think of how you can be a positive contribution to the professor's own research. This is the best recipe for a win-win situation. If you are not blessed with a good advisor I can only recommend you to protect your own interest and finish your dissertation on time. Supplement lack of support by relating to your fellow students, other faculty members or by networking at doctoral consortiums like this. Try as hard as you can to stay out of trouble with your advisor. He or she can really make your life miserable and thus deprive you from learning. In summary, a productive working relationship with your advisor and other peers is critical to your later life.

I will now turn my attention to what I so far have termed your later life, i.e. your employment.

### Finding an employer

Today finding an employer may seem easier said than done. I sympathize with this. However, there are two types of universities; teaching and research focused. I advice you to aim for the latter if you want to impact peoples thinking in the long

run. In order to influence others thinking you need to develop your own thinking. Normally you will find that you must make one step down, e.g. from first tier to second tier. The quality of your work over time will make you gravitate to the “right” tier. Identify alternative universities within your tier which you ideally would like to work for. Not because of the money but because of who you would be able to work with and learn from. In summary, finding the “right” employer is critical to the starting of your academic life.

#### Life on tenure

Life as an assistant professor on tenure track is a life in the fast lane. Within a period of 2x3 years you must prove to others that you can lecture and publish successfully. In this respect academic life is very different in Europe where you are given more time to prove yourself. Should you focus on lecturing or publishing? Publish or perish is the answer. As an Assistant Professor you need from four to six publications in top journals (for example Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Research) in order to be tenured, the maths are very simple: by year three you need one article published, one conditionally accepted and one in second review. By year six you need another three to four published articles, one conditionally accepted and two in review process. This is very hard and will require dedicated work.

### Life as tenured

As tenured Associate Professor you are expected to continue publishing in top journals, improve your teaching capabilities plus contribute to the internal life of your school. Whereas research and teaching used to take all of your time, you will now have to find time for administrative and committee work too. Life is hard! Time management will have a new meaning.

### Personal advice

As a teacher I have made two experiences that I would like to share with you. First, never forget to innovate your teaching. Learn to make use of and incorporate new technology and software in your lectures. My greatest innovation and experience was when I embarked on case teaching. It has been frustrating but very rewarding. Second, be updated on what goes on in business. It is my experience that being up to date on developments, names and firms increases your credibility in the auditorium.

As a researcher I have been faced with two challenges. First, how can I maintain or improve my research productivity when there are so many stakeholders demanding my time and attention? I have tried to follow the advice that one senior professor gave me: identify and work with other researchers who will supplement your competences. I will also add my own

advice: work closely with your PhD-students and include them on your papers. In return they may invite you into their papers. Second, I find being innovative and able to come up with good research ideas very challenging. I have spent a lot of time thinking of how I can improve my creativity. Being on the Review Board of four journals exposes me to great work in an early phase. Trying to provide helpful comments forces me to become familiar with various subjects and issues. Working together with other researchers nationally and internationally is also a strong driver of creativity. Travelling is a third. Spending time with business is a fourth. In summary, innovating your teaching and maintaining productivity and creativity is critical in your later life. Networking seems to be key in this respect.

### Networking

But how can you network with business and academia effectively? Unfortunately there is no recipe to this. You must find your own ways. Just do it! Inspired by one leading researcher I returned to Norway after a service conference in Arizona in 1993 and created my own Centre for Service Research. 15 out of 20 companies accepted my invitation. With this as a platform and inspired by Professor Claes Fornell, I went on and founded the Norwegian Customer Satisfaction Barometer in 1995. The Centre and the Barometer brought me in contact with business and academia. Apart from access to

data and the real world the Centre and the Barometer provided me with money which allowed me to recruit two PhD-students and to participate at conferences around the world. In sum this has exposed me to leading researchers who have shared their knowledge and insight with me. For example Ray's work on the theatre metaphor in services have strongly impacted my current research and thinking on cultivating service heroes.

I will now turn to my final point, your private life

Your private life

Whereas the Europeans are more inclined to work to live, it is my impression that the Americans are more inclined to live to work. Life is lived forward but experienced backwards. As an academic you will be based on the impact of your work shine like a star in the sky. People will look up and be guided and inspired by you. This motivates you to continue working hard. My philosophy has been that the foundation for your last 20 years as an academic is built during your first 20 years as an academic. Having said this it has also been my philosophy that I have wanted to be a whole person consisting of more than just work. You need to develop other sides of your self. Because our work is so demanding, rewarding and fulfilling we can easily work 24x7x365.

In order to stay in the business for a long time, it is my conviction that you need to get your mind to think or do

something else. I advice you to find a hobby you can do together with other people. Personally I play soccer every Monday night. Two years ago I enrolled into a scuba diving class. Today I try to allocate time to dive once a week. I find that relating to very different groups of people stimulate my social side and enriches my life in general.

Let me summarize

I have tried to positioned life as a service academic as a life style rather than work. Our business is to develop and disseminate knowledge. The ultimate goal is to be able to impact how people think. In order to be rewarded with such a position we need to work hard both as a student and as tenured professor. As teachers, we need to innovate our teaching style and method and to be updated on business. We also need to network with others in order to maintain or improve our productivity and creativity. A stimulating private life gives energy to our work lives. In order to be successful in the long run you need to expose yourself to business and academia. Travel and seek opportunity when opportunity knocks. While you cannot plan everything, hard work and luck will make you gravitate toward your position as an academic. Enjoy your future life as a service researcher.

Thank you for your attention.