

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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TO: Epi Faculty  
FROM: An Old Salt - Henry Blackburn  
RE: Remuneration, Restlessness and Rancor

*Request to  
Prof. Blackburn  
H. Blackburn*

Forty years ago this month, this old salt started a fellowship in the Lab at Stadium Gate 27, at that time a bonafide six-month research rotation for fellows of Internal Medicine at Minnesota. Carleton Chapman and I were the first (maybe the only) to take advantage of this fellowship.

Thus, I speak from a few years experience around this University and this community, from which reflections will be drawn in memoirs I'll put together over the coming years. But I would like to get a few remarks off my chest now, observing the (understandable) restlessness of faculty in a large University which seems "not to care".

I had no more intention of staying 40 years in this institution than you did when you came, nor any idea that my professional life would be all that "stable". The fact is, of course, every four or five years academic life changes, vision and opportunity both change, so one need not ever feel trapped or wasting time here in Minnesota.

Other things being equal (of course, they never are in Minnesota), it is the opportunity to do what you want to do that is the most important thing in professional life. As long as one has that opportunity, and it continues to open up, any additional benefit of alternatives has to be weighed very carefully.

My first conflict with the system, and with Ancel Keys, came in the early '60s. All he said to me, and without specifics, was, "Don't be in too big a hurry, Henry." I counsel you the same. We have a bright, ambitious, effective lot of youthful faculty here. But don't be in too big a hurry. Better take the long view.

Jobs, people and academic institutions, all are cyclic, in their challenge, their rewards and their potential. Wise investors don't buy into the stock market in a hurry, or for the short term; they ride out the cycles. God knows, we have had down cycles at this University, in Health Sciences, and in our own School and Division, some more profound than the one we are in now. For example, there was a strong movement by powerful people to close down entirely the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene at the time of Dr. Keys' retirement. When we beat that, I was

offered Ancel's job but with no new positions, the loss of his tenured position, and with no new space. That was about as low as we have gotten.

We had another low at the close of MRFIT when people's jobs ended, and another in the recession of the early '80s. We have been in a terribly prolonged low cycle the last few years due to economic pressures and other "problems" at some administrative levels and with faculty "values".

I have in past looked around, and you too have looked at other opportunities. There are few places with a better support system for doing research than here, or with more thoughtful colleagues and staff. There are few places in this country where an academic institution is located in a finer community for a rich intellectual, family and social life.

Rather than expect much from the University, maybe we could be grateful that it doesn't meddle a lot and provides the basics of space and support services. Perhaps we shouldn't expect it to make a fuss over us individually, or to be overly impressed with performance. The only people one really needs to impress are oneself, colleagues and a handful of others whose opinion we respect. Perhaps we should not need or expect more. To expect a large, bureaucratic, state institution to be responsive to individual needs and to reward individual performance appropriately is unrealistic. It shouldn't be necessary, if the institution provides you the opportunity to do good work.

Economically, we are "advantaged" in this community, with the lifestyle, the level of home mortgages, food, transport and safety. Standing away from it, and looking objectively, even a 50% greater salary, without these accoutrements (including the standing of our Division nationally and internationally), is truly not worth it. The greatest satisfactions in life come from a job well done among colleagues whom you respect. So perhaps we should not need too much, or want too much, and be ambitious for good works, not greater recognition and rewards.

The good ol' days are gone when we were a small unit and all working on the same couple of projects, though there is much to be said for those days. But it is important now to create the camaraderie and collegiality within each unit and project of the Division. Whether we like it or not, bigness and growth, maintaining a certain size and support system, are required for survival in this day. A lone investigator, and small units, are doomed to perpetual struggle, paranoia and, often, extinction. We need to make our own system and unit more collegial and collaborative, and focus on good works, putting away restlessness, and adapting the long view. There will be an institutional up cycle at the U., if you're only patient to ride it out. Meanwhile, fun and intellectual enterprise are priority rewards over the long-term.