



## SCIENCE AS A REWARDING CAREER CHOICE: IS IT?

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I think before I begin, a few definitions are required. ‘Science’ is defined as the knowledge obtained from the careful study of the structure and behaviour of the physical world, especially by watching, measuring and doing experiments, allowing the development of theories to describe the results of these activities. ‘Reward’ is defined as a thing given in recognition of service, effort, or achievement. The definition of ‘career’ I particularly liked was ‘an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person’s life and with opportunities for progress’. Finally, ‘choice’ is defined as the art of choosing between one or more possibilities. These definitions need to be borne in mind as we go along in our discussion.

In order to make a career choice, one should be self-aware. What are the activities that interest and excite you the most? Are you naturally curious about the world around you? Are you interested in finding out how things work, and trying to recreate them? Most importantly, do you often ask the question ‘why’ and more often, ask ‘why not’? These remain the widely prevalent characteristics of a scientist, and are coupled to a desire for scholarship and open-mindedness.

The ‘reward’ one gets as a scientist is to be able to answer such questions in a way that satisfies one’s own mind, yet being influenced by the minds and ideas of others who are asking similar questions. The reward is the recognition from your peers that the work you have done is of importance. The reward need not necessarily be an award, or a title, or a prize – they should remain secondary aspirations for a scientist, and not the prime motivation for taking on science as a career. More often than not, such ‘awards’ elude a scientist, but not the reward of making a discovery that one thinks is important.



Therefore, science is indeed a rewarding career if one's perspectives are in sync with the quest for knowledge.

We now come to the aspect of 'choice'. To take on science as a career, unlike other careers, perhaps one has to make an 'active' choice to become a scientist, rather than a default option that naturally follows as one collects degrees. Unfortunately, I find that in our country, many students of science have not 'chosen' science but have had it 'thrust' upon them – much like 'arranged' marriages! While the latter do of course succeed in many cases, one may not have made a true and well-informed choice. It is imperative that we educate our students on what is expected from a career in science – based on what science is, and science does. This will ensure that almost all people doing science find it 'rewarding' as defined in the previous paragraph.

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It is also important for budding scientists to realize that remaining in academic science is not the default option. In fact, given that less than 10% of PhD degree holders end up in Universities running their own laboratories, a life in academia for scientists should be considered the 'alternative' career. Most trained scientists go on to teach, or work in industry or research laboratories, or even branch out into scientific communication and scientific art. All such activities are extremely rewarding too, and most certainly allow career progression over many years.

So is science a rewarding career? In my mind, yes, of course. How many people get up every day, anticipating a new discovery? How many occupations allow you to meet new people who look at life in a way that you do, with the same priorities as you? How many jobs allow you to travel and see the world, so that your horizons broaden? And, if you are lucky, how many jobs allow you to make a contribution to the betterment of the world as a whole? And most importantly, for those of us who are involved in teaching and inculcating scientific thoughts and ideas in young people, how many jobs allow you to see the future? One must look to adopting science as a career choice not for monetary gain or fame, but to live a life in a logical and honest way, striving to make a difference in the lives of others, while smiling through your own.