



Dr. Julia Coronado

Julia Coronado is founder of the economic research firm MacroPolicy Perspectives and a Clinical Associate Professor at the McCombs School of Business at University of Texas at Austin.

Prior to starting MPP, Julia was Chief Economist at the hedge fund Graham Capital Management and the global investment bank BNP Paribas, and a Senior Economist at Barclays Capital. Julia received her B.A. in Economics from University of Illinois Urbana then worked for several years in the Texas banking industry in the aftermath of the savings and loan crisis. She then enrolled in the University of Texas at Austin.

After receiving her Ph.D. in Economics from UT, Julia worked as a staff economist at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors in Washington D.C. for eight years. Julia has published a number of scholarly articles on issues related to pension finances and market valuations, social security, and retirement saving adequacy and behavior.

Julia has represented the US at OECD meetings on financial market issues and has testified before the US Congress on Social Security reform. She has been a member of the Economic Advisory Panel of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and is currently on the Economic Studies Council at the Brookings Institution. Julia is also on the Board of Directors of Robert Half International and Dynex Capital and serves on the Advisory Boards of the Pension Research Council at the Wharton School and the Cleveland Fed's Center for Inflation Research. She is currently the Vice President of the National Association of Business Economists and served previously as President of the New York Association of Business Economists. Julia is a regular commentator in financial media, including CNBC, Bloomberg, Marketplace, and the Wall Street Journal.

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TAKE THE WORLD WHERE IT IS AND THEN PUSH IT A BIT FURTHER

Thanks to all the parents and family and faculty here today. As a mom and a professor, I know the hard work and love that go into seeing these students through to the finish line.

I don't need to tell this graduating class that the world is an imperfect place. You pushed forward to today's achievement through a pandemic and a recession, and you have acquired an economists' toolkit at a time when the very structure of the global economy is shifting and challenging many of our tools. Your achievement today speaks to your resiliency. But while I am here to celebrate your achievement, and to tell you that an exciting and fulfilling path lies ahead, I am also here to tell you that the challenges you confronted in the last few years are the tip of the iceberg. The world is a mess. But as someone who has stood in your shoes and is proud to call myself a graduate of the UT economics department, I can speak to both the joy and the pain from personal experience. So, I have a few simple rules of the road that I want to share with you today that I think might be helpful.

1: DO YOUR HOMEWORK

I am sorry for bringing up homework on a day like today, and maybe you thought you were done with this, but I am here to tell you it is never done. Here is what I mean. The world is not what it should be, it is made up of humans. And while some of our economic models pretend that humans are always rational and forward looking, the reality is that humans are capable of incredible innovation and compassion, but also pettiness and short sightedness. Prepare for both. If you have an interview, know who you are talking to--the individual, the company. Before you walk in put yourself in their shoes. What are they looking for? If you are starting a new job, know you are there to solve problems. Is the organization experiencing success or are they struggling? Is the group you work in respected or in the midst of upheaval?

Focus on solving problems and making life easier for the people around you and good things will come your way. Focus on understanding the context you are walking into and making life better for those around you rather than on the ultimate rewards, those will come. Apply your economic toolkit with humility—you have acquired a powerful and useful framework for understanding the world, but economics is a social science, our toolkit is neither perfect nor infallible and it constantly needs to evolve. In the workplace you are going to experience gratifying achievements as well as frustrations and setbacks, don't take them personally. Remember, it isn't all about you. Play the long game, do your homework and focus on solving problems.

2: BUILD A NETWORK

When you experience the inevitable frustrations or setbacks it can really be helpful to have your people to turn to. Classmates, colleagues, friends, neighbors, mentors. As you launch your career your network helps provide context for understanding your experiences. As you move along you can share things that work and don't work in terms of career advancement, your network can help connect you to new opportunities and vice versa. In the world of technology, we often talk about the concept of network effects, which refers to the increased efficiency that results from scale. The internet and social media are examples of where we see significant network effects—so is your career, you are more efficient and effective the more you benefit from the experience of the people that surround you. Besides, having a network is the joy of life, you have people to share the joy and the pain. You might marry someone in your network and down the road as you move up in your profession, reach back and give a hand to those coming along behind. I wish I could tell you that selfish mean people don't prosper, but that isn't true. But what has been true for me is that my classmates, mentors, professional colleagues and now my mentees are my friends and my people and the spice of life.

3: KNOW YOUR PLACE

Many of the women in this audience are sending eye daggers at me for saying this but let me explain what I mean. Back when I was a Ph.D. student in the UT economics department an economist named Linda Tesar came through to give a seminar. Dr. Tesar asked to peak to the female graduate students. Economics is a male dominated profession and has made frustratingly little progress since I was in graduate school here in the 1990s. Dr. Tesar recounted how when she was interviewing for academic jobs she would ask in the interview about maternity benefits. I think I gasped when she said this. It seemed like a risky approach. She said she was glad she did—the look on the interviewer's face told her all she needed to know about how supportive an environment it would be. She said if devoting a decade of her life to first being a research assistant and then completing a Ph.D. wasn't enough evidence of her seriousness and dedication to the field of economics and she would be penalized for being a mother then she didn't want to be there.

She was hired by University of California Santa Barbara then went on to work at the Federal Reserve, IMF, Council of Economic Advisors and is currently a professor at the University of Michigan. Linda's message was that to thrive you must find the right fit, a place where your work will be recognized and appreciated on as level a playing field as possible. It left a big imprint on my own thinking.

I was hired out of UT by the Federal Reserve Board in Washington; I could not have imagined a better job. I worked there for nearly eight satisfying stimulating years. But in year six I was passed up for promotion despite having stellar reviews, a strong track record of research and forecast work, and assurance from my boss that I was a shoe in. When I pressed for an explanation, I was told that they were worried that the all-male slate of economists they chose to promote that year were at risk of being recruited by outside offers but that if I was patient my turn would come...seriously they told me this with a straight face. The problem I have with being the long-suffering woman is the suffering part. I decided that my ambitions were bigger than what I was likely to achieve at the Fed and I went to be an economist at an investment bank, where I was given more responsibility, more money and continued doing work that I love. I also wanted to show the Fed that married women with children are also a flight risk. I had long conversations about their promotion process and after I left changes were made to that process and the next slate of promotions was a catch up round promoting women. Today two of the three main research divisions at the Federal Reserve Board are led by women. I like to think my actions made a small difference in contributing to progress and they definitely led me down a professional path that has left me with very few regrets.

So, when I say know *your* place what I really mean is find your place, deliberately make your way to a place where you can thrive. That might take some patience, it might involve taking some risks, it might involve unexpected tradeoffs, and you might just leave things a little better than where you found them.

4: BE SHAMELESS

There are a thousand ways to use your economics degree, whether that is a bachelors, a masters or a Ph.D. You have been surrounded by academics, they have a valuable but possibly biased view. Yes, there are academic jobs, but there are policy jobs, and business jobs across all industries from tech to finance to manufacturing. Find the fit that makes you happy and feel no shame. One path is not superior to another, the path that makes you happy is the best path.

I don't need to tell you the world is an imperfect place. You have seen it first-hand. The bad news is it has always been and will always be so. Looking around today some of the ugliest aspects of our history are on full display and we are looking at an existential challenge from climate change. The good news challenges embedded in the process of living and we can and have made progress. I am going to end with a quote from MLK whose words are often taken out of context—he was a man who spoke truth to power and said the hard things many didn't want to hear.

“Rarely do we find men (and women) who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.”

Go out in the world—engage in hard, solid thinking, take some risks and choose the path that makes you happy and you will take this world to a better place.