Preparing for the Conversations

- Have a plausible set of reasons you can articulate to your PI about why you want—or are considering—a career outside of academia, along with all the other factors (family, personal life, salary, etc.) that play into that choice.
- Practice giving a brief speech about these reasons until you can deliver it comfortably!
- Prepare yourself that the PI may in fact be slightly disappointed that you might not continue in academia. Faculty are trained to prepare students for academic careers, so it might take a little time for your PI to adjust to your new plans.
- Use your social network to help separate fact from fiction about how your PI might respond to the first career conversation. Be careful with this, however, for the rumor mill may have it wrong!
- Overall, and both before and after your conversations with your PI, make sure you get career advice from faculty other than your PI and UChicagoGRAD staff—the more information you get, the better.

The Conversations Themselves

- In the first conversation, involve the PI in the conversation and give them a stake in it. Ask them for their opinions, listen to their feedback, and get back to them later, as need be. For example, ask questions like “What is your perspective on the research component in Career X. Am I correct in my assumption? . . . ”
- Have more than one conversation with your PI. Follow up with them about their feedback in subsequent conversations (“I've really thought about what you said and I've been wondering if you could expand on point X . . . ”).
- If, after a couple of conversations, your PI is still resistant to the idea of your having a career outside of academia, stick to your position and restate a version of the speech mentioned above. Or, depending on your reading of the PI's opinions, consider making your response slightly less confrontational (e.g., saying “I am leaning in direction X but will consider your well-thought-out concerns . . . ”) and tactfully drawing out the conversation slightly over time.