To Be or Not to Be a Research Tenure-Track Professor

You are currently mentoring two post-doctoral scholars in your research group. Both are very talented and hard-working; however one has made it clear that his career goals do not include becoming a tenure track professor at a research university. He is interested in pursuing a career in science writing. The other scholar has her heart set on pursuing a research university tenure track professorship. Lately, you find yourself spending more time giving professional development advice to the post-doc who intends to pursue the research tenure track career. You rationalize this by saying that you are more familiar with this career path and thus have more to offer. Secretly you worry that you are writing off the other post-doc, believing that he is not worth your time and advice if he is leaving academic research.

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What should the mentor do now? What value judgments are being made by the mentor?
3. Looking back at your previous trainees – what career paths have they taken? How did you advise them? (if you haven’t mentored anyone who has moved into a career yet, think about your graduate or post-doc lab and how the PI of that lab mentored different individuals).

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