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Physician,
Know Thyself

1 • Before You Negotiate: Introspection

“How can you negotiate for what you want if you don’t know what you are looking for?”

What is it that you want from medicine? Why did you go into it?

These are questions you should ask yourself before deciding what type of job you want to take. How can you negotiate for what you want if you don’t know what you are looking for? Before negotiating, ask the questions: Where are you now? Where do you want to be in a year, five years, twenty years, retirement? Of course, ideas may change over time, but you need to head in a direction that fits your goals. The better able you are to define what you want, the better chance you have of negotiating for the right job for you.



Mistake: Taking a job according to what is popular with your mentors or peers.

It is similar to driving a car. If you have no particular place to go, then you drive your career aimlessly. You will eventually get lost, run out of gas, or you become an accident waiting to happen. Many of us find ourselves without direction. Some are thinking that the solution to their working problem is making more money. Many don’t realize that as the Beatles said, “Money can’t buy me love,” nor will it buy

a good career. What is more important is contentment and being able to do medicine in an environment that makes you feel productive, have direction, and be well compensated for your work. When thinking of the perfect contract and essential work environment, you should think of which job will allow you to do the work that you want to do, be respected, and have direction for your career. If you don't know what you want, it is difficult to negotiate because neither the employer nor you know what is best for you.

You should start with figuring out what your dream practice or job is. Make sure that this is practical, though. I know you want to make a million dollars a year while working twenty-four hours a week, be seen as the world expert in your field, have all the respect of your colleagues, be celebrated, appreciated, and well loved, but back to reality. What is it that is a must in your career and practice of medicine? Is it present with you where you are? You must ask yourself and answer the question: How do I get there? This is the premise of the negotiation. It starts with: What is in it for my situation and where do I want to be?

Money, Power, and Respect

In 1998 the rap group the Lox released the song “Money, Power & Respect” featuring Lil’ Kim and DMX. So often in our instant-gratification twenty-first-century lifestyle, we lose the fact that hard work goes into building careers and receiving “money, power, and respect.”

Example

I once had a colleague who stated that she interviewed a child and adolescent psychiatrist who was just finishing residency and inquired about a job in her office. The resident, who had not worked independently in their job, asked for a salary at \$235,000 when the average salary was \$165,000 for the area. The asking salary was given with the ultimatum that the salary was not further negotiable.

Essentially, other than finishing school, the recent graduate had no

other qualification to show why he deserved to be paid more than the average-peered colleagues. The issue with my friend was: Why pay someone who has not proven their worth over their value? The other question was: Why pay someone that amount when there are others who have proven themselves and are available for the same amount or less? There is no need to say that the offer for employment was withdrawn.

Many people do not realize what it takes to establish a well-renowned or highly paid career. Building a career obviously takes time, but also you have to remember that all buildings are done by design. It really takes hard work and dedication to a field or area to develop yourself. Being a physician is hard enough, but you have to go beyond the normal busy and hectic call of duty for a physician. It is rare for luck to strike an individual's career, but even if it does, it is required to strike again and again in order to maintain. If you ask most people who are deemed "successful" by physicians how they got to their position, most will tell you that hard work and an opportunity occurred where they could put their abilities on display. This is not only true in medicine but in all professions. Remember, though, if you do not put in the hard work, you will not be able to seize the opportunity when present. If you do seize an opportunity without hard work, then it will be difficult to sustain the success.

You Doc, Inc.

"You take your knowledge and skills with you wherever you go."

Remember that your greatest asset and benefit to any company is what is in your head. This comes through your training. You take your knowledge and skills with you wherever you go. It doesn't matter the time, place, or situation. You have to understand that the information you know is world class and difficult to attain. The skills are critically needed. It would take a genius at least ten years to have what you possess by the time you finish your training. In fact, most medical doctors are going to have very high IQs and many are geniuses.

Due to our skills traveling with us, we have the opportunity to find employment just about anywhere because everywhere there is a need for a doctor. Every doctor receives job opportunities constantly with people attempting to lure them away from where they are working. So, if you are unhappy where you are working and have other options, then why are you still working there?

Your work should be about you. Corporate bodies think of themselves and see you as a commodity. It is great to be on a job where they appreciate you and deem you a very necessary part of the treatment team. As physicians, we are dedicated to our patients, staff, and treatment team. We find ourselves working in units and gaining camaraderie over time. All this may be true, but what happens if the bottom line isn't met by a medical entity? What occurs when they find the need to save on salaries and cut services that are not as productive? If they need to cut a physician and the dollars and cents say that cutting you will make things more profitable, then you should expect to be cut.



Conclusion: You must understand who you are and what you want before beginning to negotiate in your best interest. Introspection is key to the negotiation. The ultimate dream job can become a nightmare if you take a job in what is someone else's best interest and not your own.

4. The “Gunner Attitude”

“Just about everyone in business knows that physicians have a poor acumen for business.”

We often celebrate in medicine the student who seems to know everything. The gunner wants to come across as being very impressive to more senior staff and faculty. Sometimes they come off as being obnoxious and overbearing with a flair of one-upping their peers in an attempt to support their own glory. They are quick to raise their hands in grade school and seem to always have the correct answer to impress their teachers. When working on rounds in the hospital as a medical student, they always seem to have read well ahead of what has been covered in class. If they ask a question, it will often be profound and thought provoking, and they will essentially answer it themselves in order to amaze.



Mistake: Thinking that because you know medicine, you know business.

All physicians have been celebrated academically at some point, if not most points, throughout their academic careers. As leaders of the treatment team and the perceived heads of the medical hierarchy, we can be held in both earned and unearned reverence. Much of this makes sense with the time and dedication that we have given to our academics and dedication to our field. As physicians, we are trained