

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

to attempt to know as much as possible regarding a given disease state. At the same time, there are multiple variables to every patient. Much of medicine is not hard science like mathematics and physics. But we are trained that given a specific set of facts, algorithms, and statistics, we can make an educated guess. In the medical hierarchy, we are the most trained at guessing.

The issue is that we often take this behavior and accolades into the business world, of which we have had little or no training. Just about everyone in business knows that physicians have a poor acumen for business. Everyone seems to know this except for physicians. We are trained to believe in our educated guesses, even if the foundations of our facts are scarce at best. The problem in contracts and business is that there are others who have a lot more knowledge and experience. I'm not saying that a doctor cannot know business, but if the doctor does know, it was not taught in the standard medical curriculum. In these matters, our education can fail us. The problem is that due to many of our gunner attitudes, we are the last to know, and when many of us do know, it is well too late.

Oftentimes this gunner attitude that is celebrated by some in medicine leads us to believe that the physician should know everything and be the first to speak out to show it. It gives the idea that if you do not know, then obviously you are weak, a poor study, and not as smart as the rest of us. With this gunner attitude, we fail to realize that asking questions helps to grow our understanding. I remember my father, who was a computer analyst, once saying that "if I speak too quickly, then everyone will know what I know and what I don't, but if I stay silent, I have what I know and gain what they know, as well." As President Abraham Lincoln said, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than speak out and remove all doubt." Remember that being silent is to gain information and speaking to ask questions only begets growth of knowledge. Unlike much of our training in medicine, asking questions shows a potential employee's interest, not ignorance.

Don’t Be Quick to Make Your Argument

It is important to make sure you have knowledge of your needs and/or the job’s needs before making your argument for demands. In our “gunner” spirit, we can be quick to speak and slow to listen. Many times we can talk ourselves right out of a good deal when we fail to listen because we act as if we know business as much as we know medicine.

Business Knows That Doctors Don’t Know

As doctors we often believe that we know business because we are very smart. In order to become a doctor, you have to be smart. We are all essentially smart academically and in the science of medicine. Many times this causes us to believe that this knowledge of medicine transitions to the business side of medicine. The issue is that the ignorance of the business often causes us to not even know what we don’t know. It is possible to be running a race where you are so far behind that you actually believe you are ahead. It would be like running the track at the Olympics, and as you lean forward to nip the leading competitor at the finish line, you soon find that you have another lap to go. I truly believe that our training leaves us that ignorant about how the business side of medicine works.

Always Ask Questions

It is important to always ask questions. I would go further to say always ask questions whether you know the answer or not. The reason to do this is not to be disingenuous, but to gauge the knowledge of the people you are talking to, as well as to see how honest and truthful they are. If you hear an all-out fable of the truth, then make sure you are very careful about your further interactions. Pay close attention to a liar. If a person is lying or misleading before you sign a contract, you can expect it will only get worse after you sign on the dotted line. As will be covered later, remember that contracts are only as good as the people you are signing with. The fight to get out of a bad situation can be costly with your finances and your time.

Listen

Listening is a key in any contract negotiation. One would expect that physicians are great listeners due to patient care and the need to elicit symptoms from patients we serve. In the case of fast-paced twenty-first-century medicine where caseloads are high, but time is short, it has been shown that doctors' listening skills are very poor. It is important to listen to a potential employer's needs. Listening to their needs will give potential clues on how you may meet those needs. Do not base your options on assumptions. You are more able to meet those needs and see where you fit with multiple options. It is important that you get as much history as possible, but in getting that history, it is important to understand what their needs are.

Conclusion: Listen first in order to have effective negotiation. You give yourself an opportunity to learn when you listen. Speaking too quickly will definitely give an advantage to the other negotiator simply because they are learning more than you.