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You've Landed The Interview...Now What?

- Interviewing Skills for Physicians

By Bob Eskridge, CPC, CTS, PRC

You've written a well-organized curriculum vitae (CV) with impressive information. Your cover letter shines. Your recruiter has convinced the client of your brilliance. You've landed the interview. Now what?

Interviews can cause both excitement and anxiety. You must take your appointment seriously to obtain the position you will interview for. This article is intended to help you through the process. It will help you to prepare before the appointment, to conduct yourself well during the interview process, and guide you through the necessary follow-up after your visit.

Prepare Through Research

"What can you offer us?" This is an inevitable question asked by interviewers in one form or another. Your best opportunity to answer this question well is to be as informed as possible about what they do and how they do it. For this reason, you should never walk into an interview without preparation. It is critical to learn as much as you can about the hospital or practice for which you may be working. Work with your recruiter to get the information you need. For example, research how the organization is structured and the ratio of primary care physicians to specialists on staff. Ask about their affiliations with other hospitals, medical schools, and health systems.

Search the internet for information about the practice or firm, including satisfaction statistics, specialties, and news about the organization. If you did not receive one, your recruiter should provide you with a packet of information before the interview. And finally, contact anyone you know who works there to learn about challenges, goals, working conditions, and any other information that they can share so that you are well-informed about the group you may join. Once you have collected and reviewed all the information you have obtained, be ready to put your research to work for you. Plan ahead so you can show the interviewer not only how your skills match existing programs, but also how your talents and knowledge might improve their current offerings.

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Schedule Strategically

Have your interview scheduled right away – before the competition acts, and soon enough to send the message that you are truly interested in the job. Try to avoid Monday appointments, as these are usually busy days for everyone. Late afternoon interviews may find you or your interviewer fatigued, so you may want to avoid that time as well. Plan your interview for a time when you and your prospective employer are at your best. Be sure to schedule some time to tour the area with a real estate agent to get a feel for the area. Your recruiter will be more than happy to arrange this for you. If your spouse is coming with you, the agent can be showing them the area while you are interviewing.

Ensure Punctuality

Though an obvious tip, it is worth noting that hospitals and strange towns can be confusing places. If you will be driving to the interview, determine the traffic patterns, and be sure you have excellent directions and a planned parking spot. If you will travel by air or train, confirm your travel arrangements with the recruiter's coordinator. In all cases, allow extra time for unexpected travel delays or traffic.

Dress for Success

Rules about business dress have become more relaxed, but the interview is not the time to show off your casual, comfortable wardrobe. No matter the size or location of the practice or hospital, or the atmosphere of the organization, this is a place of business, and you should show your potential employer that you respect that. It is much better to be overdressed than underdressed. During the interview, you can ask about the usual dress code or general business wear expectations.

Coach Your Spouse/Partner

Your first job after residency will likely require you to move. If you are married, a spouse can play an important role in your interview and a possible move. Employers are sensitive to the fact that a partner will play a key role in the decision making process. The partner may often help in finding schools, personal services, a home, and other needs related to relocation. Your role is to coach your partner before the interview, to be sure that the spouse will let you take center stage. Ensure that your spouse, when talking, will provide the same message as you do, and that he or she will act as your biggest cheerleader.

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Sell Your Credentials

Interviewers should already know about your credentials – they find that information on your CV. However, the interviewer may not be completely familiar with your CV. Often the interviewer is not the same person who initially received your resume, or it may be some time since the interviewer has read about your credentials. It is always a good idea to enthusiastically recount the key points in your CV.

Be prepared to sell your skills, strengths, and knowledge. Plan for any questions that may arise regarding your CV, so that you can answer them smoothly and confidently. Areas of particular interest may be gaps in training or job history, switch of residency programs, or questions about where you attended medical school. Though questions about these areas may be red flags to your interviewer, you can allay any concerns through careful explanations that may even be admirable to your future employer. For example, one young resident had a year long gap between medical school and residency because he took that year to attend theological school to better prepare himself to serve his patients.

When you are working to sell your qualifications and accomplishments, there is a fine line between being confident and being obnoxious — don't cross it. Your interviewer wants to be sure that you are a positive reflection of the office or organization, but even more importantly, the interviewer may ask him or herself, "Would I want this person treating my friends, family or my children?"

Share Your Goals and Personal Interests

Interviewers want to gain a sense of who you are as a person. You can express this by sharing what you care about and what interests you have. What an interviewer may miss on your CV is still key information that may help them make the decision to bring you on board. Be sure to share major achievements or career highlights, such as the opportunity to work with some extraordinary people in your field, or an accomplishment you are particularly proud of. The interview is a perfect chance to highlight this information.

affect your ability to serve this practice in the future, such as your dream to spend a year sailing around the world. Save those conversations for the day when your dreams move closer to reality. Coaching your daughter's soccer team, your work in a local clinic for the needy, or your passion for fly fishing are neutral topics that help define you to your potential employer.

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Act as Though This is the Only Interview That Matters

Balance is extremely important in an interview. You shouldn't act as if you are desperate for a job, but you shouldn't play hard-to-get, either. Let the interviewer know you are genuinely interested in the position; this will encourage the interviewer to take you seriously and become enthused about hiring you. People want to hire people who want the job. Do not waste the interviewer's time if you are not interested, and never go into an interview confident that you already have the job. That attitude rarely results in an offer.

Plan Your Questions

Nothing signals lack of interest and enthusiasm like declining the opportunity to ask questions in an interview. Before your interview, write down a list of all you need to know in order to make a decision about this job. In addition to the job itself, you may want to know about the community and quality of life in the area. Ask about employment opportunities for your spouse, schools in the area, and religious institutions.

Speak Well of Previous Experiences

Negativity speaks poorly of you, rather than others. No matter how badly you have been treated in previous positions, or what you have experienced in other institutions, do not speak ill of previous employers. Find something positive to say, and find a learning or growth opportunity from your previous experiences.

Approach the Subject of Money

It is perfectly acceptable to ask about salary and benefits in a first interview. However, it is recommended that you reserve this discussion for the end of the first discussion. Don't spend this time in final negotiations, but instead explore the following topics:

- What is the salary range?
- What is my future earning potential once I complete an initial salary guarantee?
- What might I be at risk for in the future?

These questions should give you an indication of whether you can accept the compensation range for the job. On subsequent interviews, you can determine additional topics to be discussed such as:

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- What are the benefits and perks?
- What are the patient demographics?
- What will my responsibilities be beyond patient care?
- How will my performance be measured and rewarded?

Of course, if you are only scheduled for one interview, be sure that all of your questions are satisfactorily answered, so that you are able to make an informed decision about the job.

Thank Your Interviewer

In a world full of e-mail and faxes, a handwritten thank-you note will distinguish you from the crowd. A personalized thank-you tells the interviewer that you care enough about the job to take an extra step. Be sure that you use the correct titles and spellings of the names of people you met — attention to detail will be noticed. Also, this is a good time to restate the two or three points that make you an ideal candidate for the position. This note gives you a final opportunity to respond.

Contact your Recruiter

It is extremely important that you contact your recruiter immediately after your interview. It is very likely the client will be calling them before the end of the day as well to discuss their findings. Be sure to go over the details of the interview. If any issues came up, be sure to let your recruiter know.

The Bottom Line

Every new job is an important step in your career, so take your job search seriously. Fully explore your job opportunities, and work your hardest at interviews so that you can display your full potential. At any interview, show the interviewer how the open position is the right job for you. It just might be!

Bob Eskridge is the President of Eskridge & Associates which specializes in the placement of physicians in both locum tenens and permanent opportunities nationwide.

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