



MEDICAL CAREER COACHING 101

A Few Focused Tips

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Personal Statement

Suggested Guidelines

By Dr. Sherry-Ann Brown

It's always hard to write or talk about ourselves. Over the years I've enjoyed reading/editing personal statements. Feel free to send me yours when it's time. Just give me lots of notice and let me know when you need it back. I generally consider you a mentee (and friend) in that regard when I look at the statement.

We all have different styles and follow various paradigms, so feel free to ask around, especially asking the current or recent trainees who submitted their statements in the last year or so. If you'd like to check out the paradigm I used and still propagate, continue reading.

Personal Statement for Residency Application (& maybe also for Fellowship?)

Here are a few suggested guidelines for writing a personal statement. I have incorporated all the advice I remember receiving for my own statement submitted in 2011. I was told by residency program directors who I met on the interview trail that my statement, in the end, was excellent and superb.

1. Length 3/4 of one page only. They may not continue reading beyond that.
2. Four distinct and specific paragraphs:
 - a. Introduction - describe something unique to your experience and how that relates to your aspirations in medicine. Try not to use this paragraph for a dramatic story, which is thought by program directors to be typical and so you may not stand out.
 - b. Main specialty, e.g., Internal Medicine - describe details about the specialty for which you are applying to residency programs, and why you want to do that particular speciality. From this paragraph, they must see that you understand what the field/specialty is all about, and that you have good reason for wanting to do that specific specialty.
 - c. Your background - describe important things about your experiences that have prepared you for this next step. This paragraph should explain your experience and skills in the areas of patient care, medical education, clinical research, community service, and leadership, as applicable. Try to hit as many of those areas as possible.
 - d. Your future plans - describe your aspirations, your vision for your career destination, and how training in that particular residency program, e.g., an Internal Medicine Residency, will prepare you for that. Make it specific to their program too if you can. End with some excited words about facing your future.

Don't use 'I' or 'me' or 'my' a lot. Write in the third person passively.

THIS NEXT PARAGRAPH MOST LIKELY DOES *NOT* APPLY FOR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Don't put a lot of emphasis on an intended SUBspecialty, e.g., Cardiology (a SUBspecialty of Internal Medicine). Mention it briefly in the Introduction and/or future plans, but the Residency personal statement is about your primary (first) specialty, e.g., Internal Medicine.

Again, this is just ONE WAY to approach writing a personal statement, not THE WAY. Find your style. Find your way. Find His way.

Interview and Job Search Philosophy

By Dr. Sherry-Ann Brown

When you are searching for your next job as a physician or scientist or both, your goal should be multi-fold. You determine the order of priority for each of the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. DETERMINE YOUR DESIRED GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

You need to sit down and think through and make a mental or written list of things are most important to you in this job search and interview process. Do you care where you will live? Must it be in a certain part of the country? With a certain kind of weather? Does it need to be a big or small city? Will there need to be a large international airport hub nearby? Are you looking for farmland? Or high rises? Should there be lakes? A river? A beach? Should you have access to broadway? Shopping malls? Movie theaters? Or acres of land fit for wild life? Will you bringing your dog, cat, horses, or birds? Think all this through.

2. DETERMINE YOUR DESIRED PROFESSIONAL SETTING

You also need to think about the sort of opportunities you are looking for. Are you hoping to spend most of your time seeing patients, or doing research, or on administrative activities? Are you

looking to start or build a program, or join in on what others are already doing? What sort of support will you need? Seek out those opportunities that will best fit what you are looking for professionally.

3. DETERMINE YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

You will have to find a way to determine the needs in each location that you are considering for your next job. What kind of patients are seen? What kind of patients are on waitlists? What co-morbidities are prevalent? Is anyone in your field there retiring or also recently hired? Do they need you right away, in a few months, in a year? Assess the needs that you may be asked to meet or fill.

4. DETERMINE YOUR TALENTS

You will benefit from taking some time to consider what you are really good at, what you are passionate about, and what you have always dreamed of having more time to spend doing at work. What are your strengths? What is your professional background? What do you bring to each potential job site that they may not have, or that they may not have enough of? What is the greatest thing about your abilities or training that will make you an asset? You will need to figure that out before you go.

Where the NEEDS in the potential job site, the OPPORTUNITIES in that location, and your TALENTS intersect - that is where you may flourish most and feel fulfilled. In that sweet spot overlapping all three spheres - that may be where you ought to be. Consider that, and search for it.

What is important to you?

Faculty Dinner

By Dr. Sherry-Ann Brown

There were some great pieces of advice that I received before heading out to faculty dinners when I first start interviewing for faculty jobs. Then I picked up a few tips on my own after going to a few. Here are five that you might find useful. Check them out, attend a few, and see if you agree.

TIPS

1. Most people have elsewhere that they could be, and for some people, elsewhere they would rather be. Those are my words. When I first given this tip, the words I was told were actually: "No one wants to be there"! I found that to be partially true. Some people really seemed to enjoy the opportunity to catch up with their friends and indulge in the new offerings on the menu, especially the desserts!
2. Even those who are happy to indulge and reunite with co-workers outside of the office or the hospital are happy to leave at some point and not overextend the evening. So, don't order something else off the menu that will require the evening to drag on after everyone's done and looking ready to leave. I found that when I offered to end the evening early, many people would insist on staying for dessert. If I ever were among folks who weren't interested in dessert and if I actually was looking forward to dessert after being spoiled so many times, then on that one occasion, I

ordered dessert to go! Dessert arrived with the check, and it was perfect for everyone!

3. People who show up at dinner and actually want to talk to you just want to see that you can 'hang'. That you can sit around a table leisurely with your colleagues and chat about life and BE A PERSON. It's ok to be real, be yourself, and be friendly - just don't say anything really silly and always be thoughtful. Hopefully, that's your own self at baseline anyway. After all, you want to be around people with whom you're comfortable, if you will be working with them all day or all night or both for a long time to come!

4. If work must be discussed at dinner, sprinkle the conversation with chats on where people live and why, what there is to do in the area, where they like to eat, and so on. It's ok to care about people in the midst of any residual work discussions that must occur.

5. Dress professionally, at the very least business casually. Wear your interview suit, or a professional dress. Remember that most people coming to dinner are coming straight from work, and so they will be dressed up too! Look and be the part.