



EPISODE 73 Should you have a job before quitting?

Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You're listening to episode number 73. Before we get started with our hot topic, I want to take a minute to thank you for being a listener of the podcast. Without you there would be no reason for me to do this. I really appreciate your sharing the podcast with friends and colleagues and random people that you meet on the street. It's so helpful for those who are struggling and feeling alone to get to hear the stories of other physicians and know that there is hope as well as resources for them. If there is someone that you can share the podcast with today, please do. That would be fantastic. Thank you.

On with our show. Today, I'm going solo and we'll be addressing this commonly asked question "Should I have a job lined up before I quit?" This comes up a lot in my coaching and it can sound like this.

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“Heather, I am the breadwinner of my family. I have to have a job before I give my notice. I don't want to go without an income.” It might also sound like this. “Heather, I am really burned out and I want to be able to take a break and spend the summer with the kids, but I'd really like to know that I have a job in my back pocket. Would the company be willing to wait for me?”

It might also sound like this. “Heather, I can't even really think about what I want to do next. I'm burned out. I'm afraid if I make a decision now it's going to be the wrong one. I just want to give my notice and take time off. That might be six months. It might be a year. I don't know. How long is it going to take me to find a job when I'm ready?”

Ah, such great questions. I hate to say this, but I'm sure you can imagine what the answer is. It's “It really depends.” It depends on a lot of different factors. How long things take, what companies are willing to do, what's your individual situation.

We're going to dive in and we'll be looking at the job finding process in terms of timing and as well as what employers typically want. And then I'll be talking about some of the advantages and disadvantages of having a job already lined up versus leaving first. And lastly, we'll go through some of the questions that are helpful for you to ask to determine what is the best approach for you.

Let's start first with looking at how long it tends to take to find a nonclinical position. I've seen it range everything from about a couple months to three years. The average being, I would say between six months to a year. Obviously, a lot of factors weigh into this. It can be this specific job you're looking at, what your background is, your specialty, what your income requirements are, how flexible you can be on location. For example, do you want to work for this specific company in your town? Are you willing to work remotely?



It can also be the time of year and what are some hiring trends and supply and demand factors, of course. Another factor can be how much time you have to put into the process. As we get more specific on your unique situation, it's easier to answer that question of how long it can take potentially.

Now if we look at things from the employer's standpoint, what are they willing to do? In general, they understand that you typically have to give 90 days' notice, sometimes more. Sometimes it's less. It's very different from the average employee that just only has to give two weeks. If you do have that 90-day notice, it's really not usually a problem for you to find a job while you're working. Give your notice, have the company wait three months for you and then start. It can be more challenging if you want to find that job, get hired, give three months' notice or longer, then take three months off and then start. So that could be a six-month delay time between starting the job and getting hired. And a lot of companies don't want to wait that long. Then you start having to look at going to have to fulfill my notice. I may have to leave without having a job and then find one and what that looks like.

One of the first questions that a recruiter may ask you is how soon can you start? In that initial conversation, this can be a great time to get a sense for how much in a hurry this company is. And if you do want some time in between to get a sense of how flexible they might be able to be on that.

Now let's look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of getting a job while you're still working. Obviously, an advantage is that you're going to maintain your income. You get this guarantee of a new job before you actually let go of the current one. Another advantage is when you're interviewing, you don't have to explain why you left. You have a job, and that can be a strong position to be in. And it's not necessarily a problem if you love your work, but it just means you don't have to explain anything.

Another advantage is there's not going to be a gap on your resume from going from one job to the next with having some time interval. Another advantage is that you remain eligible for jobs that have a requirement that you've been clinically active. There are some nonclinical jobs, for example, in health insurance, where they want you to have been clinically active within say the past year. If someone has been out of practice for a year or longer, they may not be eligible for this nonclinical job.

Now you might not think that there are disadvantages to getting a job while you're still working, but there can be few potential ones. One is, it can be just hard to put in the time to find a good job. You may be having to rush the decision. You may be just trying to get out of the fire and land in the frying pan. So, you may make a quick decision and then find out it was a mistake. And then you're back at square one. You also may not have much of a break in between this first job up and the next one.

I have had some clients who had a weekend off, maybe a week, maybe a couple weeks. And they were pretty burned out from that last job. And they were afraid to ask for much time, or they just didn't think they were able to in between. And so, they lost that opportunity.

Now let's look at the advantages of quitting your job first. One is that you're more available to the employer. Let's say you quit that job and now you're interviewing and they say "Hey Dr. George, how soon can you start?" And you say "Tomorrow." And they say, "Great." You have a lot more flexibility. That can be a real plus to the company and could even help you get hired.

Another advantage is you have more head space to really evaluate what it is that you really want. And you have time to do the searching. If you're having to travel for interviews, it's much easier to schedule these in without taking time off from your employer. And then when you do start this new job, you're likely more refreshed. You're ready to give it your all, and it might be just easier to learn new things. Some of the



disadvantages of quitting first and then finding your job is that obviously you can go for a period of time without income, and that might be a month. It might be six months. And it's hard to know sometimes how long that's going to be. When you are applying, they will likely ask you “Why did you leave your last job and why are you not currently working?”

There will be a bit of a gap on the resume. Again, not necessarily a big problem, but it's just something to consider. There are ways that you can fill in that gap. Locum tenens, telemedicine, doing some nonclinical side gig work.

Now, if you took a break that was too long, you might not meet that requirement for clinical activity, like I mentioned above. That's something to find out too. If the job that you're interested in wants you to be clinically active within a certain time period, know what that is.

Now let's look at some different questions you can ask yourself to figure out what's going to be the best approach for you. The first one is “What is your required notice?” Most commonly it's 90 days, but it's good to just go to your contract and double check and see what that is. Number two is, “Are you in a toxic work environment?” Because if you are, it could be detrimental for you to stay and you might want to leave sooner rather than later. Is it an abusive situation? Are you having to do things that you feel are unsafe for patients or are unethical?

If you're really not able to change the things that aren't working for you, you might just need to leave for your own sanity. You don't want to compromise your physical health, your wellbeing, your mental health, and there are high costs to staying in such an environment.

The second thing to look at is, “Do you want to break?” And I think it's important to answer this question, not from what you feel you should do, but what your true answer



is for yourself. Start there and then think about what are your reasons for wanting a break, what would you like that to look like, how long of a period of time, is there a certain time of year that you'd like the break to be?

I think we're typically so programmed to feel like we need to be working all the time and somehow, it's lazy, or it's indulgent to take a break. But I definitely have clients and I know from my own personal experience, how incredibly helpful taking time off is. And it can also really help you figure out what you want to do next if you're really not clear on that.

The next thing to look at is your financial situation. Are you the breadwinner? Do you have some savings? Would you be able to go for a period of time without an income? And if so, what would be a reasonable number of months? This is a great time to have a conversation with your spouse or partner. Look at the numbers, figure out what your goals are and what would really work best here.

In general, physicians tend to be risk averse, and you might think that you really don't have any wiggle room here and you have to keep working and you can't take a break. But if you're realistic and think about the long term, not just one year from now, but 10 years from now, how would this potential gap in income really play out over the long haul? Those are just some things to consider.

The next one is "How amenable is your specialty to having a break?" Now, this doesn't really weigh in if we're talking about a number of months, but if you're thinking about a big break, you do want to look at what that looks like, especially if you're a surgeon to be out of practice for a year or longer. There are ways to mitigate this, for example, if you were in between jobs and you weren't sure if you wanted to go back to clinical medicine, doing some locums or doing some telemedicine or per diem work could be a good way to still have a break, but keep that clinical time clock spinning.



Those are just some things to help you dig a bit into your own situation and think about what would be an ideal scenario for you. To summarize, I just want to mention three different scenarios that you could consider.

The first one, Scenario A, I'm calling "Out the door." This is where you decide you really need to take a break. You can't even think about what's next. You give your notice and leave. This is what I did and I took a long break because I really felt that if I just tried to figure out what I wanted to do at the time when I sold my practice, it was going to be a mistake. And I felt like I had no headroom to think about anything nor did I want to. And I know that's a luxury that I have. And a lot of you don't have that luxury. I don't mean to sound flippant about it at all. That just happened to be my situation.

But I think sometimes we really do need a break. And I'm going to be talking about this in the next episode, which is the pros and cons of taking a break and how to minimize liabilities when you do. I'll be diving into that further next week.

Scenario B is where you leave with a plan. You want to be able to give your notice, take a break and then have a good idea of what's next and how to figure it out. What this looks like when I work with my clients is that we go through the Carpe Diem process, but we don't do the last step. The last step of the carpe diem process is E - Execution. Actually, making that change and getting a job.

They do everything up to that point. They have a good idea of what career direction they want to go in. Maybe they want to take a break and then come back and be clinical. Maybe they want to go nonclinical, but they know what that's going to look like. They have a really good idea of how long it's going to take, how strong a candidate they are, and how to go about finding a job. They usually have their resume ready, their LinkedIn profile, and then they can go and take a break and have this assurance that they have a game plan.



But since they don't actually have a job, they can be pretty flexible about “I'm going to go to Italy and spend some time there. Or I'm going to just hang out with the kids for a while. I'm maybe even going to do a little side business in between.” There's that sort of more open-endedness to it.

The third scenario is Scenario C - Leave with a job in hand. You want to have that job offer before you give your notice. This is pretty common. I see that a lot, especially if you're the breadwinner and you want that security, or maybe you don't. You don't need a break. You don't really want one. Maybe you've had a lot of vacation saved up too, and you've used it in your last job and you feel pretty good.

One of my clients, he is the breadwinner and he made a clinical transition. And then he's made a couple of nonclinical ones. And each time before he left, he had that job in hand. And that has worked well for him.

As I was working on this podcast, it was making me think of this old Paul Simon song called 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover. And in that song, there's only a couple different ways that he mentions, not 50 at all, but there are different ways to leave your job. I want you to find the one that's best for you and I hope this podcast has been helpful in giving you some ideas of how to think about this process.

Stay tuned for next week's episode where I'll be going over the pros and cons of taking a break and how to minimize any potential liabilities. Thanks for listening. Please share this podcast with anyone you think would find it helpful, and don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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