



EPISODE 83 Are You Prepared For Your Nonclinical Job Interview?

With guest Dr. Karyn Woelflein

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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 83. Today we're talking about how to prepare for a nonclinical job interview. I'm super excited about this episode for a number of reasons, but a big one is because we have a lovely guest who's going to help us out by her willingness to share her own personal interview experience.

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Our guest is Dr. Karyn Woelflein. She is a physical medicine and rehab physician who after 18 years of clinical practice found herself at the crossroads. Dr. Woelflein is going to share a story about how her first nonclinical interview was a bust, but as she went on from there to hone her interview skills and land a job she loves.

We'll be talking about what happened in that interview and the positive changes Karyn made going forward and actionable tips you can use for success in your own interviews. Even if you don't have any interviews on the horizon, it's incredibly helpful to prepare in advance and much of the prep work can be done before you even apply to jobs. Without further ado, I'd like to offer a very warm welcome to Dr. Karyn Woelflein. Hi. Hey Karyn, how are you?

KW: Hi, Heather. I'm doing well. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

HF: Oh, thank you. This is so exciting. And I get to see you because before we used to just talk on the telephone and I didn't even really see you.

KW: I know, I know. It's really nice to see you.

HF: Likewise. All right. We're going to spend most of the time today talking about this whole interview situation and you sharing tips and advice. But do you want to just give the listeners a little context of where you were when you first decided to interview for a nonclinical job?

KW: Well, I had been in practice at that time, probably about 16 years, and I saw an opportunity, locally, to apply for a job in a disability insurance company. And I was starting to think about a change, that I was getting a little tired of clinical practice. I didn't know what else I was going to do. So, I thought I would give this a try. I was

comfortable doing disability reviews and disability evaluations in my own practice. So, I thought this would be a good place to start.

HF: Yeah. So, you'd been practicing for a while. And what happened in that interview?

KW: It was a very lengthy interview process and it was certainly the first corporate job that I had ever applied for. I was working in a large outpatient, private practice at the time and had worked for a hospital before, but never worked for a corporation. And so, I had a number of phone calls that I spoke to other doctors who worked for the company. And then, I came in and met with people at the company and had sort of days where I shadowed people. And then at that point they decided that I would come in for an actual job interview. And so, that whole process took about five or six months when I'm thinking about it now. It took a long time.

HF: That's an unusually long process. I have to say.

KW: It was. And I had this mindset at that point because a lot of it was really sort of informal conversations, kind of fact-finding submissions for me to learn more about the job and the company. I kind of figured when I got to the interview stage that I knew everything I needed to know, and that the job was mine. I just needed to walk in there and wear a nice suit and boom. That was my mindset at that point.

HF: Well, it's understandable because it was almost as if they were courting you. They let you shadow people, ask questions, they were spending time and resources to get to know you. And then when you get to the formal interview, I'm sure it felt like, well, this is just a formality.

KW: Yeah. That's exactly it. I did very little preparation. I remember the person who was going to be my boss or supervisor saying "They're going to give you a clinical vignette to talk about, and they're going to ask you some behavioral type questions and a couple of other things, but that's what's going to happen. And you're going to meet with this many

people.” And I looked up a little bit like what a behavioral question was, but I absolutely did not prepare any answers to any questions. I did nothing.

HF: Well, you're like, “I got this” because when we do our clinical job interviews, we don't really prepare for those. We know how to talk about our skills as a physician. And we really don't have to sell ourselves because the people who are interviewing us, also understand what we do and what we bring to the table simply even by looking at our resume.

KW: Right. Exactly. Exactly. That's usually just a formality to see if you fit with the group and if you can interact with other people in a way that's appropriate.

HF: Yeah. You have a personality, you're breathing, you have pulse.

KW: Exactly.

HF: You are who you say you are. So yeah. It makes sense that you wouldn't do a whole deep dive into interview prep, given what you had experienced. Now, what actually happened in this interview that didn't go the way you thought it would?

KW: The interview day, there were several interviews that day. And I met with some different people, one on one, and that all seemed to be going well. And then I met with two separate groups of people. One was for this clinical vignette and the other was for these behavioral questions.

And for the clinical vignette, I was able to sit and prepare that and then discuss the case with people. And that went pretty, pretty well. Probably not as well as it could have, but it did go okay. But the behavioral questions, I just floundered. They asked me questions and I didn't really think about my response. I just started my inclination is to sort of just dive in and start toggling. And I would just talk about things that had no real purpose at

the beginning and no conclusion to the answer. So, I knew it was going badly, but it ended. And then I still thought like I had a shot because of all the time, as I said, that was invested in my job.

HF: Right. Of course. Yeah.

KW: But I did have the opportunity with this recruiter that I had been working with on the phone, she called me to tell me that I didn't get the job. But she did give me some feedback. And I can tell you, it was really hard to hear, but it was honest and constructive. And she told me some things why it didn't go well.

HF: Do you remember what she said, Karyn?

KW: She said that it was clear that I knew... There were a couple things. One, that it was clear that I knew what I was talking about sort of clinically, but I had a hard time defending my position in this clinical scenario when it came to interacting with these other people. And that was something I didn't prepare to do, sort of having this back-and-forth conversation with other people.

And then the other piece was the behavioral questions. And she said that I didn't have a lot of direction or thought behind my answers. And that I seemed uncomfortable talking to people. That part of the job was really going to be talking with people that needed someone who was more confident and secure in their answers. And that it just didn't seem like I could do that.

HF: Yeah. It is hard to get feedback, but it is helpful when it is objective and it is feedback meant to help you, not to put you down or criticize you.

KW: Right. And I was not able to demonstrate an ability to do those things, even though I could do that every day in my clinical practice, I was capable of doing it, but in that environment, I just fell apart.

HF: Yeah. The brain freezes. That's one of the reasons why preparation is so helpful because it increases our confidence level and then these behavioral questions, which can be "Tell me about a time when you dealt with conflict or made a mistake or had to think on your feet when things didn't go well."

When you've prepared those, you feel more comfortable coming up with stories because you already have them, but on the spot, I really think our brain can freeze. And then what can happen, what you're describing is we ramble.

KW: Exactly.

HF: We get anxious and anxiety makes us talk often, if that's our personality or it makes us shut down, we can't even think.

KW: Exactly. I think all of those things happened to me.

HF: Yeah. But that's not the end of this story, which is what I love. If any of these things have happened with you, know that there's a way through this to a happier conclusion. So, take us back now to where the story picks up after you didn't get this job. What happened?

KW: I felt really embarrassed, demoralized and I thought, "You know what? I can't. I'm not cut out for that work." At the time I thought "I just can't do it. I'm not going to do it." So, I stayed with my clinical job and I continued on and I was doing some other things as part of that job to try to make it better for me so that it makes it more interesting and enjoyable.

And so, there were certainly things about clinical medicine that I liked and that I was doing. But also, I was adding in some other things on the side that were useful and helpful. And I learned that I really liked that part of my work more than some of the clinical things that I was doing.

And then I had some job changes that I wasn't able to do, disability evaluations and chart review kind of things anymore. That side of my practice went away and I really missed doing that. And at the same time, I was starting to lose interest and feeling a little discouraged with my clinical career. And that's when I decided I need to make a change. But given where I had been before, I knew I needed some help because I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do and how to go about doing it in a way that would be productive. And so, that's when I reached out to you.

HF: I know. I'm so glad you did. And I remember that was about the 18-year mark you've been in practice and you were ready for a change. And you told me about that interview experience and I felt bad for you because you're a lovely person. You obviously could do the job and you just needed some prep. So, now this gets us into the part of how did you start preparing when you were ready to apply to a new nonclinical job? What was different this time?

KW: Well, one, I knew I needed to prepare. That this was serious. I wanted to get out of clinical medicine and I wanted to get a new job. So, I knew that I needed to prepare. And so, when I applied for jobs, I knew that it was important to research them and learn about the job and learn about what I was applying for. And specifically, I know that you and I talked about the preparation process, sort of looking at different questions that could be asked in an interview and then preparing answers for those questions and also practicing.

HF: Yeah. And then this is so key and it's one reason why you could prepare a year in advance. You might be okay in your career and you might be thinking "Well, in about two years when I paid off my loans, or whenever, I think I want a nonclinical job." You can even start preparing now because a lot of these questions have to do with "Why do you want to make this change?" It could be that. The question, "Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses. Tell me a time when you handled X, Y, Z." These are these common bread and butter questions that 80% of interviewees get asked. So, you don't need to already even know where you're going to prepare for a lot of them.

KW: Yeah. And I think it's really important to be clear about that stuff too, even as you're preparing to leave or thinking about your job. Part of that preparation in general is just being clear about who you are and what about you. Just from a professional standpoint who are you and why are you leaving clinical medicine? And also, then why do you want to do this particular thing? Why did you wake up this morning and decide to apply for this particular job? But having those things clear for myself was really helpful.

HF: Right. And when you think about these behavioral questions, which often are, "Tell me about a time when", how do you prepare for those? Is there a structure that you like to use or for answers or thinking about them?

KW: Well, I think first of all, you want to be able to tell a story that is succinct and has a beginning and ending and a conclusion. And one of the mnemonics that I think we talked about was the car mnemonic, which is a challenge, the action that you took and then the result. And it doesn't have to be like a rambling tale. It can just be...

HF: One minute. One minute is good.

KW: Yeah. You want to keep it "Here's what happened. Here's what I did. And here's how it turned out." And having a few different clinical scenarios that you could sort of plug in to

different kinds of questions, because those types of things can be flexible. A weakness or a strength or a conflict and a weakness or whatever. Those things, you can interchange them. And so, having a few different ones that you're comfortable with that are true, and that you can talk about, I think really helped me having those kinds of things prepared in advance.

HF: Right. And they can be hard to think of at the moment. That's why we tend to go "Um, uh, ah" because that's another thing that I remember that you had some of those fillers, because that's what we're often doing when we're thinking. We're going "Um, uh, am" but we don't know it. And that's why it's helpful when you're practicing to record yourself and do it with someone else so it's a real role playing. But then you got rid of them. When you're aware of it, you got rid of them.

KW: Yes. Although I think I may be doing it a little bit in this particular interview.

HF: No, you're doing great. You're doing great.

KW: Yeah. I think you and I practiced, I practiced too alone. And I think I was resistant to practicing because I thought it felt strange. But what it does is it gives you a sense of time, for example, how long it takes for words to come out of your mouth and how long it takes for you to say a thought. And giving you a moment to think about the question before you start speaking. Those moments seem to take forever when it's happening, but they really aren't that long. Even just a few seconds can feel like forever. But when you practice, you can get more comfortable with those little breaks and the silence that is there, that is not as long as you think.

So, practicing was helpful in that way. And I think it also helps you get comfortable sort of talking about yourself without feeling maybe silly or like you're bragging or that you're just making stuff up. It really does help you to feel more comfortable talking about yourself.

HF: Right. Because we're not used to selling ourselves, but that's one of the beautiful things about these vignettes or short stories. It's when you tell a story about how you successfully handled a crisis or came through or really helped rally your team, when you tell a story, it rarely comes across as bragging. And the story itself speaks to who you are. So those stories are golden.

And another thing about them is people rarely remember when you're going, "Whap, whap, whap" and just talking. They will remember the story because that's how we grew up. We grow up listening to stories and they connect us emotionally to the person telling the story. So later after the interview, what they're going to remember is what you told them. And they're going to go tell the hiring manager or the director, "I just interviewed this doctor. And let me tell you this story she told." That's what's memorable.

KW: Right. Exactly.

HF: And another point that you spoke about, which I really want to highlight too, is that when you're asked a question and you're not sure what to say, pause, take a deep breath and you can even say something such as "Oh, that's a really good question" to buy yourself a little bit more time. "I'm glad you asked that." And there you go. You can be thinking while you're saying that.

KW: Exactly, you can totally do that. And I think you can, which is nice with Zoom interviews or even in person interviews if you have a little pad of paper, you can make a little note and say, "Yeah, that's a good question. Just thinking for a minute." Or you don't have to say that out loud, but just saying "That's a really good question" and then giving yourself a moment to collect your thoughts and take a breath. Because even for me, all the preparation, it's still in that moment, trying that out and saying it to someone is a little different than saying it in your head.

HF: Yeah, very true. Very true. I want to take a short pause here. And when we come back, we're going to talk about the don'ts. Some things not to do before the interview. So, we'll be right back and don't go away.

It makes me happy to share free information with you, such as this podcast. If you'd like to have additional free content, you can go to the Doctor's Crossing website and check out the freebie tab at the top of the page. Here you can access a downloadable career transition starter kit, as well as guides on topics such as interview prep, resumes, chart review, telemedicine, pharma, and medical writing. With more on the way, if this sparks your interest, you can find these resources under the freebie tab at doctorscrossing.com. Now back to our podcast.

All right. We are back here with Dr. Karyn Woelflein, and we've been talking about how to prepare for the interview. Before we go on with the don'ts, I just wanted to also mention, since we hadn't really touched upon it too much about studying the job description. A lot of the prep you can do in advance before you even know the job you're applying to. But once you do know what that job is, tell me a little bit about studying the job description.

KW: Well, I think it's really important to understand the job description and the role that you would be playing in the company that you're applying to and what those skills might be, so that you can use your vignettes and stories to sort of illustrate your ability to do the job. So not that you have to be super specific, but if the job requires that you're able to be organized and work independently or have a story that illustrates your ability to do that.

HF: Yeah. That's a really excellent point because it might be the job description talks about teaching or working with stakeholders and building relationships. And those could be some great vignettes that you could have to illustrate those skills.

KW: Exactly. Yeah. Working on a team or being able to have a couple of things going on at the same time. Multitasking and that kind of thing.

HF: Yes. Excellent. We're getting close to the end here, but I do want to address some of these don't. So, what are a couple things that you want to share with us?

KW: One thing I think is to not assume that you have the job when you go for your interview, which was the big thing that I did. And also, do not assume that all interviews are going to go the same way. And so, be as prepared as possible and not assume that just because one interviewer didn't ask you this set of questions, the other interviewer isn't, or that anyone's going to ask you anything that you have any preparation for at all. But really don't be stuck and assume that it's going to go exactly how you think it's going to go.

HF: That is fantastic advice because it's so true. I can't tell you how many times I hear this story where a recruiter will reach out and after someone applies and they'll say, "Oh, I just like to chat with you for a few minutes." And so, they don't think of this as a formal interview. And then they're talking to the recruiter and the recruiter asks a question such as "Well, where do you see yourself in five years? What kind of compensation are you expecting?" And then they're broadsided. They would've had this great opportunity to really kill it. They're already fumbling. So, you're absolutely right. You never know what to expect. Crazy things happen in these interviews.

KW: Exactly, exactly. Don't not be prepared when you pick up the phone the first time because who knows? You just don't.

HF: Yes.

KW: Yeah. I think that's the biggest thing. And then don't be afraid to ask questions if you're not clear, especially on those first calls. If it's not clear to you from the job description,

just understand what it is you're applying for. Don't be afraid to get into that right off the bat if you're talking to the recruiter. And then don't come without questions, make a huge list of questions. Because I think having questions of all kinds is really helpful.

HF: Yeah. Because sometimes you get to the end and they say, "Well, do you have any questions for us?" And you're thinking, "Oh, I'm just going to be polite" and say "No, I'm good. Thank you." And that is the worst thing you can do.

KW: Yes. Even if you feel like you understand everything they've said and you know everything you could possibly know about everything the job has to offer, you could still ask a question. "What do you like about your job? What's your favorite thing about the job?" Anything at that point is better than nothing. So, have more questions. Because you may even ask all of your questions during the interview as the interview's going along and you may have all those questions asked, all the burning questions that you had, they're still going to ask you.

HF: Yeah. They're still going to ask you.

KW: In the end, do you have any questions? Just even one question is better than none. You don't have to pepper them with questions at the end. Because I know having interviewed people in the past both when I was in practice and even now in my current job. If you say it, it just doesn't feel good.

HF: Right. It's like they're not really invested in this big decision that they're making. You brought up a good point that you can ask somebody, "Well, what do they like about this job?" And a lot of these questions can help you understand more about the culture and even what they're looking for in a candidate.

One question I really like is "When you hire somebody who works out well, what are the characteristics? Or when you hire someone and it doesn't work out, what tends to be

the reasons?” And then you can start understanding if you're a good fit and help make that case if you really haven't gotten to speak to whatever those qualities are.

KW: Yes. I love those questions. I definitely love those questions. Now that we're talking, there was a good question that I asked once and someone said, “Wow, no one's ever asked me that question before.” And that's really cool too because I think then they remember you for asking that good question. Maybe you already know the answer, but just asking it, I think it just shows that you're interested and thoughtful and you really care about the thing you're applying for.

HF: Yeah. And I like to think of these two different buckets of questions. One is the nuts and bolts. These questions might be, “Well, what's the onboarding process like?” And this is where you might be talking about schedule and compensation. And then there's the bucket of strategic questions, which can be, “What are some challenges that your company is facing that I might be able to help with? Or if I'm fortunate enough to have this opportunity and it's my one-year review, what would you like me to have accomplished during that year?”

These questions are really showing them that you're thinking about them and it's not all about you. So, there's so many ways you can make a great impression just by building that bridge from you to them, you to them.

KW: Yeah, exactly. It's a good way to make a connection with them and help yourself too.

HF: Right. Exactly, exactly. All right. This has been really wonderful. Karyn, are there any last tips or thoughts you want to share? It could even be about making a transition itself.

KW: For me, it was important to know what it was that I wanted to do and not so much what I didn't want to do anymore. When I applied for that job way back when, I was looking for an escape route and therefore I didn't really prepare the way I needed to. And as I



decided that I was moving away from clinical medicine, but moving toward the job I'm doing now, it was a lot easier to prepare both for the job search and the interview, but also just for the transition, knowing what I wanted to do as opposed to knowing what I didn't want to do anymore.

HF: Such a great point. The whole thing of we're not just getting out of the fire into the frying pan, you're moving towards something. And what are you doing now?

KW: What I do now, I work in utilization management for an insurance company. I work with a team of physicians and we make determinations about inpatient hospital stays. And I love it. I work at home and I work 08:30 to 05:00 and I feel like a real member of a team. I think we do good work and it's really challenging intellectually. I'm still using clinical skills, thinking about medicine and it's been a really great transition.

HF: Well, congratulations. And thank you again for sharing your story. It's so helpful to see that we can have some bumps and bruises along the way, but that's not the end of the story. We just keep going. And we're smart. We can learn how to do things and have successes.

I wanted to let you know that there is a freebie that comes with this podcast and it's on my website. If you just go to doctorscrossing.com and at the top under the freebie tab, you'll find an Interview Tip Guide. So, feel free to go ahead and download that. And we'll give you some tips that we've already talked about today, plus some additional ones. So just go to doctorscrossing.com, go to the top in the freebie tab. And there'll be a bunch of freebies there, including one on interview tips. So, thank you again, Karyn. It was really lovely to have you.

KW: Thank you for having me. I hope that this is helpful for anyone who's listening.



HF: Oh, I'm sure it will be. And guys, as always, 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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