



EPISODE #230: Nail That Recruiter Interview: Build Your Bridge to the Next Round

With Heather Fork, MD

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It's more important than ever to take that very first screening interview with a recruiter seriously. So today, I'm going to walk you through this conversation as if I were coaching you one-on-one, showing you how to prepare, how to think about what the recruiter really wants to know, and how to build what I call a bridge between you and them.

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Welcome to the Doctors 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 Doctors Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a non-clinical 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.

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Hey there and welcome to the Doctors Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host, Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 230. With the job market for non-clinical roles becoming more competitive, it's more important than ever to take that very first screening interview with a recruiter seriously. A lot of physicians expect this call to be a casual chat. And yes, sometimes it is.

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The recruiter might just tell you about the role without even asking a single question. But other times it's much more a real interview with questions like, where do you see yourself in five years? And suddenly you're fumbling, caught off guard. I don't want that for you. So today I'm going to walk you through this conversation as if I were coaching you one-on-one, showing you how to prepare, how to think about what the recruiter really wants to know.

and how to build what I call a bridge between you and them. Because that's really the heart of this. This isn't about reciting your bio or checking boxes. It's about connecting your story to what they care about. So let's dive in, my friend. Step number one, see it through their eyes. And I call this the three-legged stool. So recruiters are basically trying to answer three questions about you in the screening interview.

I think of it as a three-legged stool. One, can you do the job? Do you meet the core qualifications and have the right background? Two, can they afford you? Are you in the ballpark for salary and compensation? And three, do you play nice in the sandbox? So of course this means, are you easy to work with? Are you collaborative and professional? That's really it. Once you understand this, the game shifts. Instead of thinking, how do I impress them? You start thinking, how do I build a bridge from where I am to where they are and who they want for this candidate? So step number two, build that bridge. So the bridge is about connection. It's showing them not just who you are, but why you want this role at this company and how your story fits with their mission. I remember a long time ago, I went to like a one day career workshop.

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when I was just starting coaching and the speaker was talking about these two different terms, whiffed and whiffum. So whiffum is what's in it for me and whiffed is what's in it for them. And so when we really switch our mindset to thinking about what's in it for them that I can bring to the table and how can I speak to that one, it takes the pressure off of us because often when we're thinking so much about ourselves, it makes us nervous. But we're very good and natural at thinking at how we can help someone else. It's sort of our default. So if we shift our perspective to that during the interview, it serves this great twofold purpose. You relax more and also you have a better chance of speaking to what they really are looking for and making them feel like you care about their mission. You really want to help them.



So let's take the classic opener they often start with, tell me about yourself. So often we would recite our CV in a shortened version. I did residency here, I practiced x-years there, I'm board certified. And that's fine, but it can leave you standing on your side of the river waving at them. The recruiter is on the other bank thinking, okay, but why us?

Here's how a bridge answer could sound if you're applying to a clinical documentation improvement role that's CDI and they ask you this question, tell me about yourself. So first, I like to have you start with something interesting about your past or about you. It could be that you grew up on a farm or maybe you were a nurse before you went to med school, something to begin telling a story because that's what gets people's attention. So you tell a little bit about the past and then you bring it into the present about a bit about your training and experience, and then you get to specifically about this role in this company and what can that look like. So when you get to this part of the answer, you might say, people have often commented on the thoroughness of my notes and honestly, it's because it's always mattered to me that the patient's story is captured accurately. When I learned about CDI, I immediately felt it could be a great fit.

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A way to keep using my clinical skills while helping ensure the documentation truly reflects the care that was given. I've spoken with a few physicians who work at your company, and what really stood out to me is how committed they feel the organization is to its mission. Not just using CDI to maximize revenue, but staying focused on accuracy and integrity. That really resonates with me. So see how that ties your experience to your values and then connects those values to their mission. That's the bridge. And this is something I could do a whole podcast on answering this question, tell me about yourself, but just a simple shift of connecting you to them when you answer this question can be a game changer. Moving on to step number three, prepare for the most common questions. You don't have to prepare for everything, but you do need to be ready for the most common screening questions like,

Tell me about yourself. That's one of the top ones. Why are you interested in this role? What do you know about our company? Why are you leaving your current job? What are your salary expectations? When can you start? And then depending on what the job is, if

it's a remote job, they might ask you, how do you think you would do working remotely, especially if you've been in clinic all the time around people?

And then if there's a travel component to the job, they'll likely ask you, are you okay with 25 % travel or 50 % travel or whatever it is. Now, caveat here. Sometimes they'll even go deeper than you expect asking things like, what would your boss say about you? Or tell me a time you had to make a tough decision. Or if you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be? So anyway.

I mean, that's a very random question, but sometimes you do get kind of off the wall ones. And with my clients, we actually prepare for the screening interview and the later interviews at the same time. It's not strictly necessary, especially if you're short on time, but it means they walk into that first interview already prepared for most of the questions they might get asked. It takes some extra time, but it does build your confidence. And so I actually like to say before you ever apply for a job, before you

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And so I actually like to say before you ever apply for a job, before you hit send on your application, it's good to do interview prep because I have seen people send in an application and that day they get a phone call and they're not even sure who it is, but it's a recruiter and before they know it, they're on a de facto interview or the recruiter might say, I'd like to meet with you, here are some times for tomorrow. When could you meet? And so you really don't have that time to prepare. So quick tip here.

You can use ChatGPT to help you these questions. You can tell chat what you're applying for and say, give me the 20 most common interview questions I would be asked. And then you can go with that list, give your answers to chat and get feedback. So that's great to do, especially if you're in a crunch. Ideally, it is good to have the practice be more interactive with someone else, but chat can be very helpful, especially if you're in a time pinch.

Moving on to step number four, salary. How to handle this gracefully. Now let's talk about the question that makes a lot of people uncomfortable. What are your salary expectations? Here's a simple two-step approach. Step one, deflect politely if you can.

Because you don't wanna be the one putting the stake in the ground first, because then you could lowball yourself. So you might say,

While salary is important to me, having a fuller understanding of the role and the overall compensation package would help me give you a more informed answer. If you have a range in mind, I'd be happy to share whether it aligns. This keeps the ball in their court, and often they'll give you a number or a range if you ask gently, or they might just do this upfront. It could also be posted in the job description. Step number two, if they press for a number without giving you a range,

Give them a range. You could say, based on my research and what I've seen for similar roles, something in the 250,000 to 300,000 range seems typical. Is that in line with what's possible for this role? And if they come in low, stay open. You might respond with, that's a bit lower than I was anticipating based on my research, but I'd be open to learning more about the responsibilities and growth opportunities.

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Stay calm, professional, not defensive. That's the goal. It's just a conversation. All right, step number five, ask thoughtful questions. At the end, it is very common for the recruiter to ask, do you have any questions for me? And sometimes we've spent so much focus thinking on, my God, what could they ask me? What could they ask me that we forget to think about preparing questions. And what you never want to do is say, no.

I'm fine. I don't have any questions. You never, ever want to say that because there's a lot of opportunity to, again, impress the recruiter with the questions you ask, not just to get information from the answers. It can be both. So I like to think of this as questions coming from two buckets. One bucket are the strategic questions, and these make you look good and build a bridge. And then the other bucket

are the logistical questions. Things like schedule or travel, whether you can go to an appointment during the day, what's the flexibility? And these questions can wait potentially. So you would like to lead with strategic ones such as what qualities make someone stand out in this role? Another one could be what do you most enjoy about placing candidates in this company? And that's showing



that you're interested in the recruiter. You could even ask them how they started working with this company because people like to talk about themselves. And this is another way you can show that you play nice in the Sandbox that you're genuinely interested in the recruiter. So you could ask a question about them that's professional but shows some curiosity about them. You might also ask, is there anything else I can share that would help you assess my fit?

And that way, if there's something you left out that's important, you have a chance to respond to that. So these logistical questions such as, you know, what's the onboarding like? What are the growth opportunities? As I mentioned before, a lot of positions want to know if this is going to be a job where they're having to work nights and weekends. Is it going to be more than what's anticipated? So think about, is this a question I have to ask now before going on with

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the interview process because hopefully you'll be invited for the next round or could it wait. But if it's something you have to know and that's very important to you such as if it really is 50 % travel and you don't want to travel at all, that's good to get clear right up front or if the salary is actually just too low, you don't want to waste your time and you don't want to waste their time. All right, now moving on to the last step, step number six, which is follow up within 24 hours.

So within 24 hours after your interview, you want to send a warm, concise thank you email. It's great to mention something specific from the conversation. You could restate your interest. You could mention something that you found out about the job that was even more intriguing to you. And then ask about the next steps. It's a simple gesture that goes a long way and it's something that

people even with the best intention and know that this is something to do, sometimes just forget. And I know that's normal. But it will make a great impression. It'll stand out from other candidates who don't do that. All right, now wrapping up here, I'm just going to recap briefly. So we had the first one, remember the three-legged stool. Can you do this job? Can they afford you? And do you play nice in the sandbox? This is basically where the questions are coming from. Two, build the bridge from you to them.



Three, prep for common questions. And if you have time, prep for harder level and higher level questions. Four, handle salary with common confidence. Five, ask thoughtful questions. And six, follow up with gratitude. So remember, this call isn't just a screening, it's your bridge to the next opportunity. So step onto a prepared, professional, and curious. All right, I have a little freebie for you.

So if you'd like more support, there is a freebie on the website, 10 Steps to Rock Your Interviews. You can find it on the doctorscrossing.com website under the freebie tab. We'll also have a link to it in the show notes. And if you want some personalized help, I offer one-off coaching sessions. These one-off consultations could also be used to do some interview prep. Just reach out to us at team at doctorscrossing.com. (team@doctorscrossing.com)

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that's also linked to in the show notes, and we can share details about scheduling that consultation. You've got this, my friend. And don't forget, as always, to carpe that diem, share the podcast before the sun sets with another physician, and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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