

## Hire Me!! ... Please?!

What if I say “Pretty please”? Will that help?

Applying to jobs is downright, no good, throw-mud-in-your-face-and-make-you-feel-worthless, terrible.

I am an admin resident. I thought, for sure, leadership positions would never be saturated. With my degree of professional drive and stunning smile–high heel combo, employers would be jumping at the chance to take me on. Right?! ... wrong.

It all started on a beautiful, sunny day in February. The air was crisp, the snow was fresh, and my red nose and cold toes put a pep in my step to get to work 2 minutes faster than I usually do. My day started as usual: coffee, e-mails, prep for the next meeting, more e-mails, more coffee, chat with the secretary, so on and so forth. During a totally normal weekday meeting (you know the kind – if you don’t have something to contribute, you multitask), it was announced that one of my coresidents was receiving a job offer. From *our* hospital. It took a second for the news to register, but then I reacted as any phriend would: “Good for him! That’s so exciting! He really is the best guy for the job!” and other clichés that involve exclamation points. But that afternoon, I could feel my resident-world starting to shift, and not in a good way. I hadn’t even thought about job searching or asking my director about possible openings in the department. I was chugging along as a classic “nose-to-the-grindstone” PGY2 who lives at the hospital, has no food in her fridge at home, and can’t remember the last time she did laundry.

Why hadn’t I thought about job hunting? Maybe because I didn’t think I needed to? Or because it’s FEBRUARY! In my fog of trying to get today’s work done and get ahead on tomorrow’s, I actually completely forgot that the real world was only 150 days away from knocking on my door, putting its palm out, and asking for my first loan payment in full. Reality check: I needed to jump on the job-hunting train ... AND FAST.

“Job hunting, applications, resumes, and interviews are fun!” said no one, ever. You hear people talk about it, about how tough it is out there, but you really don’t understand the shoptalk until you’re living it. You can’t even ask other people for advice on what to do: “get a job doing what you love!” Umm, no one is going to pay me to eat ice cream all day and yell at reality stars on TV. Then there is the “whatever you do, don’t settle.” Ya know what? Settling sounds goooooood right about now. Settling comes with a paycheck that allows me to EAT and pay my RENT. My advice: don’t ask others for advice.

After that February day, I embarked on an emotional job-hunting roller coaster that I can best relate to the five stages of grief. I have always hoped that my highly intellectual brain and sassy spirit couldn’t be compartmentalized into a by-the-book psychological study of emotion. But in this case, I am the first chapter, complete with pictures and examples, of what happens to a person grieving over a job she has never had.

### **Denial**

I never really thought the seemingly fictitious “End of Residency” would ever come. Plus, I was confident that none of my other coresidents had started job searching. I convinced myself that this particular job-obtaining overachiever was the only one.

Over the next 2 months, I waited. I answered the inevitable (and increasingly annoying question) “so what are you doing next year?” with a sigh, shrug, and lopsided grimace. I worked up the courage to discuss job opportunities in the department with my program director and was given a couple of potential openings within the next 100 days. Feeling less-than-hopeful, I began filtering through the Internet, scouring the

national organization websites, and even had an awkward encounter with a headhunter. Without any excitement or desire, I applied to a few supervisory and managerial positions in my geographic areas of interest (which were NOT strict, mind you). No response. Although I was actively applying, which helped me fall asleep at night, I determined that it was still far too early to be worrying my pretty-little-head about this. Plus, there is no way that someone as marketable as me, with as many CV-building activities as ME, is not going to get a job. OK, no problem. I'm fine.

### **Anger**

Until two more of my coresidents got jobs in the spring. At *our* hospital. Not again. Their news was simultaneously the best and worst news I had heard in a long time. After some hugging and congratulatory back-patting, I sulked off to my little corner of the administration offices and completed a line of expletives so long and varied, a proper sailor would have been proud. My world was shifting. Again. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs "WHAT ABOUT MEE?!" and throw a world-class temper tantrum, one that would make my niece and nephew proud.

But I didn't, because (a) I'm an admin resident and (b) I'm not 4. Instead, my knee-jerk reaction was to apply to even more jobs. I mean come on, they told me a long time ago that if I completed 2 years of residency, there would be a cushy job in exactly the field that I wanted waiting for me at the other end. Therefore, with enough applications, I am bound to get an interview, and when I do, I will show it off to everyone: "Look what I have here! A fancy interview! Just for me, not sharing. Ha!"

### **Bargaining**

I never did get an interview from my random applications; turns out the Big Bad Wolf (HR) will eat your CV. But I did get a few other offers from "friends of friends" (pharmacy really is a small world – I've heard it, but I never truly believed it). These jobs and their interviews were great, and everyone I met was someone I pictured myself working with. However, a little part of me, buried somewhere deep and ugly, still really wanted to continue in my resident role, with a manager title, in a place "where everybody knows your name."

There had not been a discussion about jobs in our department since *T* minus 100 days. So maybe I just needed to try harder. Maybe if I told my director again that I *really* wanted to work here (if there were a PGY3 at this point, I would have taken it), she would magically conjure up a position and fabricate a salary for little ol' me. I even toyed with the idea of taking on even more work than I already had, just to prove I could do it. I was one bended knee away from proposing some wild scheme of project and policy writing to secure a position that didn't exist. Plus, if I made the proposal, I wouldn't have to beg my mom to let me live in my childhood bedroom.

### **Depression/Reflection**

I know what you're wondering: did she propose?! I did not try to bind this imaginary job to me for life. Instead, I spiraled into making depressing backup plans. I began to give up on all of my hopes and dreams of clinical pharmacy leadership and began to die a little inside with each passing workday. I made plans to move home and cohabitate with my parents once again. Naively thinking I would have a place in my own room on the second floor. But as I started to hash out this soul-crushing plan with my parents, I was told I would have to live in the attic, because let's face it, the grandkids got my room at the house a long time ago, and there definitely isn't any extra room for [ADULT] me in there. Now I am painfully aware that I am the least favorite, I have been replaced, and no one really wants me. I am that last bite of pizza crust that just isn't worth the calories or the post-consumption sick-to-your-stomach feeling you get after eating it. Better to throw it in the trash. Outta sight, outta mind.

Of course, I couldn't help but meta-analyze my projects and performance over the past 9 months. Clearly, all of the blood, sweat, and tears that I had put into my work thus far were not enough. Clearly, I had offended someone. Clearly, I was not the outstanding resident that I thought I was, but rather, a less-than-average, totally unremarkable slob whose contributions to the department actually set it back a few weeks, if not years. Thankfully, everyone was too nice to tell me what a terrible job I was doing to my face. On one particularly depressing evening, my glass of wine and a Lifetime movie actually convinced me that I deserved to feel like this, and I should just give up on this particular dream of mine. Since I obviously had no real skills to bring to the table, my to-do list for job hunting changed and looked a bit like this:

1. Carry around a horseshoe at all times.
2. Wish upon every shooting star.
3. Find and break a wishbone.
4. Avoid all black cats.
5. Befriend a leprechaun.

### ***Acceptance & Hope***

At about the time that I was starting to fend off the real world with a chair and whip like a lion tamer, I had an amazing interview for a job that I never thought I would qualify for. They said they "liked my passion and honesty, and those are the character traits that you cannot acquire during orientation or on-the-job training." They weren't worried about my lack of experience or blatant fears of being in the position (for future reference, do not lay these fears out in black and white, like I did – it scares other people). What qualified me for the job was simply ME. Of course, my 2 years of residency didn't exactly hurt, but let's stay focused on how nice it was to finally hear that I was actually an OK human being! If that's not a win, I don't know what is.

I slyly inquired about positions within the department one last, desperate time. Administration had no definitive answers but claimed that if I could wait just a little bit longer, there would definitely be something. With that response, the spiraling of my world slowed, my stomach unclenched, I squinted my eyes open, and I realized that my roller coaster was upright and slowing to a halt. The wave of nausea I had been experiencing for months lifted. I couldn't accommodate their request for a little more time. I was finally letting go of my imaginary job and accepting that life will in fact go on ... somewhere else.

A particularly wise coresident of mine who was also slow to accept the inevitable arrival of the real world said, "Ya know, it's nice to finally feel wanted, to be more than just another face of a resident who leaves every year. We're smart, Tammy, and people will see that." This talk, in conjunction with my acceptance of leaving, made for my best night's sleep in months.

Looking back, I realize I was probably afraid to pick up and move on again. The beauty of moving on is all the new, interesting people there are to meet, the different challenges that energize instead of drain, and going to work every day knowing that you are wanted. For anyone who is currently riding my roller coaster, please know that the ride does not last forever. Those of us who have made it to the end of the ride are waiting for you with balloons and confetti!

About the Author: Tamara Malm is a retired pharmacy resident, aspiring chocolatier, and horse enthusiast. She currently resides in Connecticut, where she enjoys reading, taking cat pictures, and dreaming of living somewhere warm.