PREPPING FOR THE INTERVIEW DAY ARTICLE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGY®

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Recruitment Season becomes the main event in programs across the country. Program Coordinators can be responsible for organizing rooms, interview schedules, preparing score sheets, folders and applications, designing websites, answering endless phone calls and emails, and be "Air traffic control" on the interview day. Taking a step back from the intricate details, we cannot forget our responsibility of preparing our faculty and residents of the Interview itself.

Interviewers' questions pertaining to marital status and plans for a family is less frequent now than they used to be. Still the law prohibits discrimination based on gender (including pregnancy and childbirth), race, religion, national origins, age, and disability. Medical Schools prepare candidates for those "questions" that may be seen as illegal and make them aware of the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Candidates are taught to deflect the question or respond in a positive manner emulating their priority of residency training. For example, they may smile, remain pleasant, and answer the question by focusing on their seriousness and commitment to post-graduate education.

As our candidates prepare for the interview, how do we prepare our stakeholders for an important event?

- A clearly defined recruitment goal which is embraced by all stakeholders could be the first and foremost program objective. Speaking to the departments' strengths and positively responding to any weaknesses will help the candidate properly assess the program. Communicating these ideas and having different sources project the same message can be persuasive. Candidates will notice the consistent message and may place you at the top of the list because of the unified front the team provides at the interview.
- The behavioral interview was developed for business but is now used with increasing frequency in residency interviews. Medical Schools prepare their students for these types of questions. The program may decide to have a few scenarios ready for the interview day. If this is your methodology, try to have different scenarios so different performance skills can be discussed.
- Be enthusiastic and knowledgeable about your residency program, department, and institution. Thoroughly research various aspects which make your program unique and convey the information to the candidate. For example, your GME team may provide an institution-wide Housestaff Wellness Program. This may show a glimpse of the current culture which is a determinant for some candidates. Emulating the importance of balance could increase the level of interest in your program. You may choose to add this vital information into your program presentation or direct them to a website.
- Encourage your team to always listen attentively and actively. Often, interviewers are excited about the opportunity to speak about the program and leave little time for interaction with the candidate. Most programs offer an informational session during the interview day, therefore, plan appropriately. On the other hand, often interviewees will provide clues that may be an area of concern. A suggested practice is to have the interviewers meet briefly during the interview day and find out if there are any concerns for any applicant. In the event you only have 20 - 30 minute interviews and an applicant may have a red flag, a faculty member can continue to probe and dig deeper with the candidate later in the day. Communicate with each other and often.

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- Be sure you provide faculty the candidate applications in a timely manner so interviewers can take their time to review their portfolio. For any faculty that lack time to review, you may develop a face sheet which is a grading system reflective of the program's ideal candidate.
- Provide research projects, faculty or resident publications, presentations, etc. Candidates are often accomplished themselves; if they can associate themselves with current projects, it will open the conversation and build a relationship between the individuals. If the interviewers happen to NOT be the researchers, make sure you have the faculty members' emails accessible so they can reach out. If you want to take it to the next level, place the faculty member in direct contact with the candidate.
- Make sure the department is presentable. Be sure that any floors, kitchens, and areas of congregation are clean. First impressions can make the difference. Furthermore, check on interviewer areas. If you have faculty members that are very busy and may not keep an organized office, try to provide assistance to organize well in advance. Although it may not be your responsibility, the amount of work you put into recruitment may be disastrous due to this small aspect.
- You know your people best. If possible, try to create an inviting atmosphere for everyone. Relax, get a good night's sleep the night before, and enjoy this time of the year. I often think the next person I meet, could be the next person in our Neurology family! Always remember this may be their first experience with the institution, so put your best foot forward.
- Provide your team with documents. Legal vs. Illegal questions during recruitment. You may find a resource guide on the AAN site to assist in the process. I have utilized Recruitment Jeopardy to educate our team on potential questions in a fun, entertaining format. I understand why both sides may be concerned on legal ramifications and deter faculty from getting involved. But if we can prep them properly, this learning experience could build confidence with asking certain questions. As a coordinator, we can consider ourselves as the expert and guide our teams in the best way we know how.