



# A Guide on Personal Branding

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**PurposeMD**

Understand the "Why" of your career in medicine



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# Your First Interview. A Scenario

One could be forgiven in thinking that the interview trail is a series of opportunities putting yourself on a stage for residencies and presenting yourself as “perfect enough” for them. But, in wanting to be perfect enough you may be pressured to alter parts of yourself or parts of your story in inauthentic ways. In other words, you compromise your integrity to present a pseudo-story you erroneously think others would be more willing to hear. We do this despite knowing how refreshing it is to be in front of someone who owns their story and lives their truth unforgivingly. This may happen because over time—amidst countless hours of school and studying and research and all the rest of it—self-reflection and introspection fall to the wayside and a crust of familiarity begins to form. In turn, the diluted advice to “just be yourself” has lost its appeal and you lose sight of various parts of yourself as a result. Then when it comes time to share your story in an interview, we resort to a retelling of our CV or fall into ruts of unoriginality.

Here, we'll try to chip away the crust and peel back the layers of your identity to create an authentic and real telling of your story that is relevant to those who need to hear it. As you go through this process you will see that, much like medicine, there is a false dichotomy of art and science in “storytelling” by means of an interview; one complements the other.

Now, take the time to imagine yourself at your first interview; however, switch the roles. You are the interviewer. You are interviewing yourself. With the roles switched, the questions follow suit: What story would you love to hear? What story would make you want to know more about who is in front of you? What aspects of the story would you want to know more about? This mental experiment is a crucial step in telling your authentic story. It invites you to present yourself in ways that you would be proud of, not in ways that are clouded by another's perspective at first.

After going through this mental experiment, return to being the one interviewed and consider the following:

First, it is always wise to have this question to check in on: ***“What is the story that only I could tell?”*** This question is often given as advice in the writing of a personal statement for good reason, and it applies just as heavily to a situation in an interview. It helps you avoid clichés and come across as truly original. While it's possible that this advice can, at times lead you to be too creative or come across as trying too hard, it's a great first steppingstone to listening to yourself rather than using second-hand thinking.

Second, **be enthusiastic** about your story. The fun etymology behind enthusiasm is to be “inspired by or filled with a god.” This enthusiasm is the cardinal ingredient to the tone of your story, and it is infectious to others. We've all heard what should have been an exciting story shot down by a monotone voice or ruined by an overconfident demeanor. It is worth noting, however, that no amount of enthusiasm can heal a bland story, nor can enthusiasm be fabricated—it is easy to see through forced excitement and pretentiousness. With those considerations in mind, enthusiasm is a cornerstone to a story well told. It shows a self-belief that welcomes others to believe in you too.

Third, here's the general setup to share your story: ***“So, tell me about yourself.”*** If your response is too staged and memorized, you sound robotic and stale. If your response is too improvised, you sound unprepared and careless. There is a threshold in between that has both structure and flow, which is where you want to be. Luckily, you will have read this primer before responding so you don't have to fumble anxiously over your words. You will have contemplated and reflected on why you're in that room with the interviewer. You will be humbly confident in how you tell your story. You will have a story that is airtight with vignettes highlighting the strengths and values of yourself and impacts you've made rather than passively stating what you have done and how things have happened to you. Your story will have a sense of completeness to it— One that gives others a sense of your past, present, and future in ways that remind yourself and the interviewer that your story is about pursuing something that is ultimately more important than the residency spot you're vying for. That is what this guide is about.

# Your First Interview. A Scenario

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*"You're never going to kill storytelling because it's built into the human plan. We come with it."*

*-Margaret Atwood, Poet, Novelist, Literary critic, Essayist*

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When we were younger, we loved stories. Do you remember that? You may have asked your caretaker or teacher to "Read just one more story, pretty please!?" Afterwards, you'd drift off to sleep with visions of adventure and romance carried along by your imagination. As human beings, we are wired to relate to stories. Stories are foundational to our experience as humans.

At some point the thought of "I'm going to become a doctor" became a "true" story for you. You wondered what life would be like being a doctor. You were excited by that, and you were excited by the way that you would be a contributing part of society as a doctor. You wrote about this in your med school application. Guided by this story, you persevered to make the story a reality.

Before anything was reality, it was a thought, and then it was a story, and then you acted on the story to make it a reality. You did not spontaneously appear in medical school. Your being in med school was once a thought; it was once a story you told yourself.

## Your stories create your reality

OK. Now you are in med school. How does the story continue?

For most med students, this is where their imagination fails them. They begin to lose their story. They begin to focus on the transactional part of existence. They say, "Well, I need to match into a certain specialty. I need to get a certain score on a test. I need to get honors in a certain rotation." This is like saying for a trip to Hawaii (instead of focusing on the adventure of the trip), "I'm solely focusing on maximizing frequent flyer miles, renting a car, and booking a hotel." Sure, those things are "needed" to some degree (so is eating lunch, going to the bathroom, and taking a shower), but when the transactions become the main focus, the story becomes lost.

## "So, tell me about yourself."

Back to the residency interview. The interviewer says to you, "So, tell me about yourself." What will you say? Will you be able to tell your story?

Most people can't. This is because most people have lost touch with their story in medical school. In lieu of a story, they cobble together a number of transactions (stuff from the CV) into a mock story. They focus on tactics to answer questions in a way that other people want to hear rather than telling their authentic story.

Human beings are good at discerning a good story from a bad story. We've been listening to stories since the beginning of time. If you were to listen to a pre-med tell you their story, would you be able to sniff out a good story from a cobbled-together one? Of course you would. Well, your interviewer can do the same for you.



Interview  
Preparation

# What is Your Story?

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*“Man, sometimes it takes you a long time to sound like yourself.”*

*–Miles Davis, Legendary Trumpeter, Bandleader, Composer*

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You may think that your story needs to be a been-there-done-that phenomenon. This leads to one of the main obstacles of story-crafting, which is the stress of thinking you may not have one yet—or the right one at least. You’ve been too busy—doing med school, research, interest groups, conferences, volunteering, and all other time-consuming activities—to create and finish the unique story you aspire to have. Or perhaps you’ve been busy trying out and exploring so many different brands of yourself that you never had enough time to develop any particular one significantly. This could lead to feeling that your path has been vague and that you’re going to fall victim to the I-love-science-and-helping-people paradigm that you were told to avoid in the rhetoric of med school applications. Then, in need for inspiration, you look to your CV hoping to find a unique experience you think would sound best to others. As a result, you mistakenly equate the qualities of your identity to your biography or pedigree, which is relatively less interesting and complex.

At this point toward the end of medical school, you already have a host of life events fused with your own unique perspective on them—too much, in fact, to ever have a reasonable amount of time to share them all. We need to focus on your unique perspective because while you may think you partook in many of the same activities as everyone else, your experience of them was entirely different. This perspective is an integral part of an authentic story. We get too caught up looking for unique experiences that we’ve had and look over the unique perspectives we’ve gained. These perspectives are the core of your story and, unsurprisingly, the most interesting parts most people, including interviewers, want to hear. These perspectives—gained from thinking about your past, present, and future—are large parts of the qualities of your identity and define who you are.

To hone your story, you must spend time with it. You must reflect on **your past**, which give clues to you about your work to come. Reflecting on the highs and lows of your past will give you insight about the general direction that is suitable for you (see Appendix 1).

You must reflect on **your present** circumstance. What is the greater meaning of the situations that you are currently dealing with? What are the key decisions that you are called upon to make?

You must reflect on your future. What kind of impact are you looking to have? What are you going to bring to medicine? Why should society have you as a doctor?

You combine the three elements in a way that is meaningful and inspirational to yourself and to others. Of course, you’re not carefully honing your story just to ace an interview. That would be approaching life from a transactional point of view. You care about your story because your story drives your life.



WHAT IS YOUR STORY ?

# Developing Your Story

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*“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.”*

*—Parker Palmer, Spiritual Genius, Educator, Writer, Activist*

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As you continue reading this guide on your story and brand, you may be expecting the recipe-esque style of how to make a good one; however, the purpose of this guide is not to jump into the philosophical territory of how to create your story, but rather how to convey it. You have already accumulated the experiences, relationships, idiosyncrasies, beliefs, successes, failures, and other words in this in-exhaustive list which create the mosaic that you are today. Now you're challenged to create a lens through which others can see you that is representative of how you see yourself. Moreover, this lens is a story to be developed and curated in a way that attempts to give others a chance to know you like you know yourself. You may be quick to develop your story by first figuring out what to say and how to say it. We invite you, however, first to explore what to listen to regarding your story and how to listen to it, then the rest—including meaningful things beyond a solid residency spot—will follow. The following reflections on your past, present, and future should serve as a guide to reflect on what to listen to.

Before we listen, we need to rid ourselves of the pestilence that is second-hand thinking. Second-hand thinking simply refers to using someone else's thoughts and claiming them as our own. Understandably, we'll go listen and read examples of others' stories to get inspiration to think about our own. But we need to be mindful that we may come across stories that seem more interesting than ours or see stories that are expressed in ways we think are so perfect that we want to steal the words to describe other experiences of our own. We will then superimpose others' perspectives on our own experiences and come out with a clunky story and an unoriginal presence. In other words, we start to tell someone else's story more so than our own. It's a sign of immaturity and it's easy to see through. Think of when you've seen this in others—they are all foreground and no background. On the other hand, it's absolutely refreshing to be in front of someone who is completely themselves—they have listened authentically to themselves and have honorably owned their story as a result. Gather the courage to be completely, wholly, unforgivably yourself—have self-authorship and invite yourself to the invisible geography of new frontiers in your identity. This is a crucial step in developing it.

This next section of the guide is dedicated to gathering material from your past, present, and future to create the substance of your story. The gentle reminder here is to give this the respectful time it is due—hurrying doesn't work here. After you have gathered the right material, we'll transition to how this material affects your brand and how all of these meaningful parts of your life can be communicated into a story you can tell to others.



# Your Past...Where have you been?

Medical school admissions directors often boast of the diverse talents and backgrounds of the people entering the healthcare field. Yet by the second month of medical school, much of that uniqueness seems to be overlooked. Students worry about their ability to handle the rigors of medical school. There can be a herd mentality regarding approaching the medical school experience.

In response to this tendency to follow the herd, students should return to their stories. They should remember who they are with their unique talents and background and how they have used their strengths to overcome challenges in the past.

This story of your past is the story that has brought you here today. In order to understand your present, you must understand the events and memories that have shaped you. What kind of person are you now? Why are you in medicine? What kind of work are you motivated to take on? These are questions which have clues in your story of the past.

## Background

Let's begin with your earlier memories. Where are you from? What do you identify with? What were some things which have happened in your life that you continue to remember fondly? These ideas and notions have been with you for a long time. In the background, they have shaped your view of the world and offer clues about the path in life that you wish to take. (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Background)

- **What do you remember most fondly?**
- **What kind of kid were you?**
- **What was the most formative aspect(s) of your background?**



## Values

In life you will be offered many options and choices. How will you choose? In the past you have made choices, and those choices were made based on your values. What do you really value? What kind of things really caught your attention? As we continue to act on our authentic values, our lives become an expression of our authentic selves. Remember back towards earlier times in your life about what was important to you. (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Values)

- **What kind of things or issues did you pay attention to back then?**
- **What kind of activities did you engage in that were meaningful?**
- **Who did you look up to?**

## Formative Experience

We can all remember a few experiences which have taught us some core life lessons. Often those experiences shook us from a place of comfort and challenged us to grow in a significant way. Other experiences brought us in contact with a brand-new perspective and opened our eyes towards possibilities of the future. What were some of the “turning points” in your life up to now? (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Formative Experience)

- **What was something you did or experience which “shaped” you?**
- **What was the biggest challenge you faced?**
- **What did you learn from the body of experience you’ve had?**



# Your Present... Why are you here?

In the daily process of life, you tend to the things which seem urgent. They demand your attention and so you tend to them. You do this day after day, week after week. Until one day, you wake up and ask yourself, "Why am I here?"

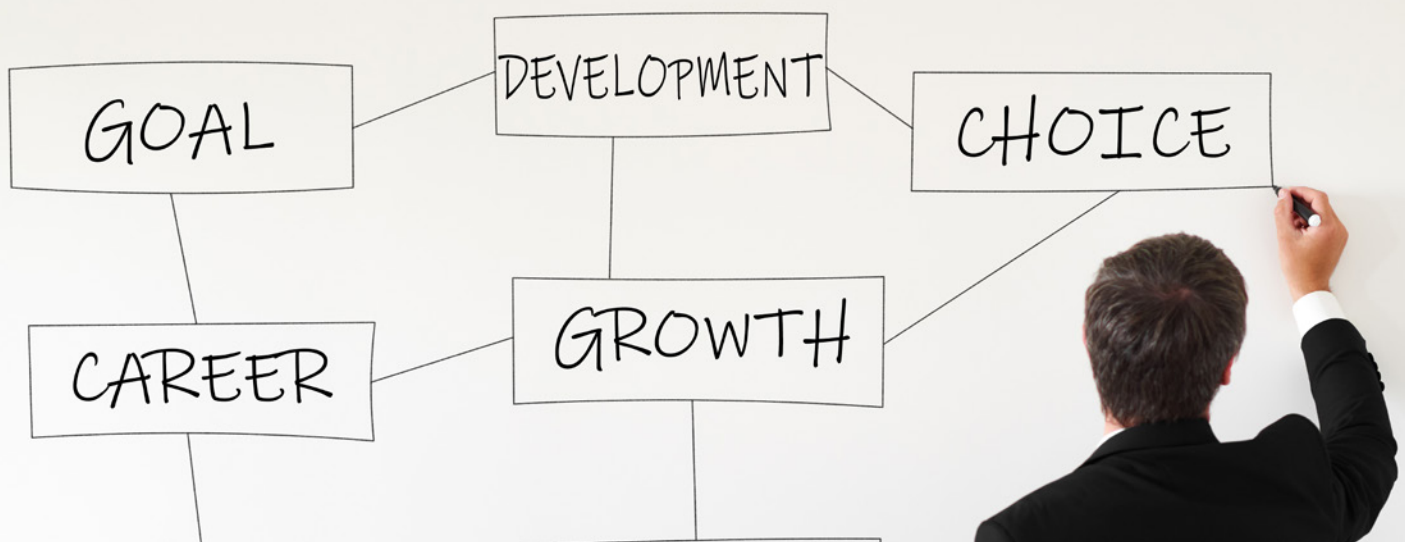
During school, this is one of most important questions to ponder. Very likely the answer is still a work-in-progress. It goes beyond choosing a specialty. It goes beyond the question of an academic or private practice focus.

What does this answer look like? One attribute of a good answer is that it gives you strength and energy to persevere. The answer should give you a hit of positive energy. It feels a bit like returning home because it is returning to your truer more authentic self. The answer should also be unique. That is, another person shouldn't be able to say the exact same thing to the question. It should take into account your past story and values. Let's now explore some elements towards this question of, "Why are you here?"

## Choices

You are here because of some past choices. What were the key choices that brought you here? Why did you make those choices? You will be making more choices in the future and will realize that the choices you have made up to this point holds clues to how best to navigate the myriad of choices you will have while in medical school. (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Choices)

- **Why did you choose to do the thing you are currently doing?**
- **How do you tend to make choices?**
- **Reflecting back on the choice, would you have done something differently?**



## Affiliation and Affinity

Medicine and healthcare is a vast professional field. Within this field, there are many opportunities for you to find your niche and community. Who are the people with whom you enjoy being with? Who are the people that most call upon you to serve?

Medical school is an important time for exploration. While in school, there will be a lot of pressure on individual performance. There may be a desire to be by oneself. Be sure to balance one's individual academic work with one's professional exploration. When you look back at your medical school experience, you will often find that the most meaningful part will be your relationships and the impact that you have on others. (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Affiliation and Affinity)

- **What's the most significant activity you engage in with your current role?**
- **How are you impacting others?**
- **How are you growing? What are you learning about yourself?**

## Direction

Medical school is just the beginning of your story and journey. Ahead of you are many directions and paths. What doors will you open and what doors will you close? The present moment is about choices. How you choose, based on your purpose and values, will write the next portion of your authentic story. (Please reflect on the following prompts relating to Direction)

- **What choice(s) are ahead of you?**
- **What is important to you? What are you called upon us to do?**
- **What general direction are you choosing to pursue?**

# Your Future...Where are you going?

There was a time when you decided to go to medical school. This decision is a life-defining decision. It entailed hard work, discipline, and a noble sense of commitment. This decision oriented your life and gave it direction. You knew where you were going.

Now you are in med school, how do you orient yourself? Are you trying to direct yourself into a good residency program? That approach does sound familiar, but is it really a goal that will bring out the best in you? (Hint: no) What is a good direction to follow?

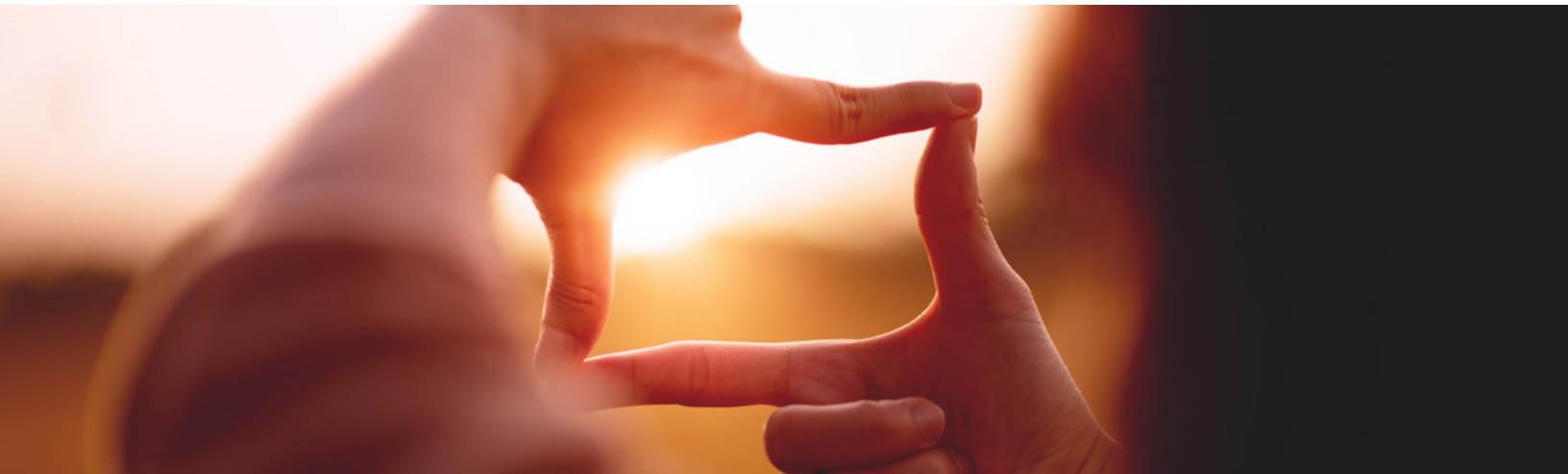
In medical school, there is a transition—a transition from a pupil to a professional. What is important for a pupil is not of the same importance for a professional. This professional is technically proficient as well as committed to service beyond oneself. However, what is the nature of this service? This is a question for you to explore; it is unique to you and your story. It can take a while for this direction to emerge, don't become discouraged. Continue to try things out and reflect on their suitability. (A useful exercise can be found on Appendix 1: Charting Your Life)

As a result of your life and career, what is the difference that you will want to make in the world?

## Challenge

Many people choose the medical professional because of the opportunity to create a positive impact on others. Often, the greatest impact comes from overcoming the greatest challenges. Fortunately, the world is full of challenges. You are indeed in the world, and you are needed to be at your best. To get the best out of yourself, you must put yourself against a compelling challenge. What is a challenge that you would be interested in tackling in the world? In facing that challenge, you create a memorable story for your life!

- **What is a challenge in your next stage that you would like to tackle?**
- **How would you use your strengths and skill to overcome that challenge?**
- **In what way do you wish to grow and develop?**



## Vision

Remember the challenge that you were willing to take on? In facing challenges and resolving them, you create a positive impact. When talking to people at the end of their lives, they reflect on the impact that they had on other people. What does the perfect world look like relative to that challenge? A related question is, "What is success?" How will you define it for yourself?

- **How do you ultimately define success for yourself?**
- **What kind of person will you become?**
- **What kind of impact will you have on others?**

## The Next Step

As you think about your future, you have defined a direction ("Challenge" section) and a goal ("Vision" section). We now return to the near future. What will you do this month? What will you do this week? What will you do today? Through your actions, you write the story. What is the next step for you?

- **What choice have you made about the next step?**
- **Where do you want to be? Doing what? With whom?**
- **Why?**

# Developing Your Authentic Brand

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*I would love to live  
Like a river flows  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding*

*–John O’Donohue, Poet,  
Philosopher, Theologian*

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Often times we may segregate parts of ourselves that we think are seemingly unrelated. We may split our “medical” lives from our “non-medical” lives, our “job” selves from our “play” selves. This isn’t about behavior; there is definitely a time and a place to be professional and other times and other places to be playful. This is about your story. When we separate parts of ourselves in our stories, they can turn out clunky and discombobulated when presented to listeners. What’s more, when you fracture parts of yourself you ruin beautiful opportunities to present yourself with candor and originality. You ruin a chance to show the integrity of your character to others.

Part of this integrity is sharpening your ability to tune in to yourself. Much like finding a clear radio signal or using a GPS so you can identify the specific roads you are traveling on, it is important to tune in to the experiences and perspectives that are gained during medical school; this practice will help you clearly communicate your experiences, strengths, and values to others down the road. Take a moment to tune in to parts of yourself that you haven’t integrated together yet. As much as things can come apart, they can fall together. Too often are we placed in thinking buckets—distilling our experiences into categories and labeling them for some mental filing cabinet of memory. Less often are we inviting our experiences to flow together to find undercurrents carrying themes of ourselves with them. When we allow this to happen, originality and integrity result.

*For example, an aspiring anesthesia resident was putting his story together in preparation for personal statement writing and interviews. He went about seeking anesthesia-related values and experiences relative to his life. He thought linearly about pharmacology and how it allowed him the privileges of being the “guardian angel” of patients during surgery. Nothing wrong with this route, but nothing great either.*

With some guidance of a mentor that helped him tune in, he thought more holistically about his brand, identity, experiences, and aspirations for becoming an anesthesiologist. Turns out before medical school he was a jungle tour guide in Costa Rica. When asked about his experiences there, he highlighted how he loved to be relied on as he led people through uncharted territory that was new and somewhat scary for them. Soon enough he was on to integrating this part of his life into his desire for a career in anesthesiology and he had quite a story to tell on how he arrived there. This was a manifestation of his authentic brand. As you transition to think about your authentic brand—which is derived from, and an inextricable part of, your story—begin to recognize how your past, present, and future has given you insight into what your strengths and values are, what type of reputation you want to develop in medical school, and how to keep track of these in the form of stories for others to hear later. Doing this type of reflection and work as you train will improve your ability to communicate who you are during the residency application process and interview trail.



## **Incorporating Strengths and Values**

Part of the process to better understand your authentic brand as a professional is by highlighting your strengths and values in the experiences you've had. At first, it can feel overwhelming to think of what strengths and values are coming out of certain experiences. However, as you think about them deeply time and again, they will begin to reveal themselves. Much of the work to be done is to process the things that are already happening to you to better understand who you are in different situations. Using assessments like Gallup's Strengths Finder, which provides a top five strengths report, can provide a new vocabulary to start exploring your strengths/talents and how they show up in different settings. For example, when you are in a team setting, it can help you notice how you use your strengths to get things done, to collaborate with team members, and to address challenges as well as solve problems.

It is worth noting that it is uncommon to start thinking about who you are becoming and yet such a critical aspect of your professional development. Thinking about who you are becoming will continue to pay dividends for the rest of your life and there are many ways to do it. For example, think of your values when you make decisions, explore specialties, and work with others. What is congruent and what is incongruent? How have your values guided your decisions? Answering these questions will help define your personal values and strengths as you make sense of things. They will also inform the type of reputation you are building, which is a foundational component on which your brand and stories stand on. Many medical students struggle to define their strengths and values. As a consequence, they put off thinking about them and save them for the future thinking they will be easier to process by then only to find that they are just as lost. Don't be that medical student.

- **How can you apply your values and strengths to your authentic and best self?**
- **What is congruent with your values?**
- **How have you observed your strengths and values come in to play in different settings (Meetings, presentations, interactions with colleagues, during teamwork)?**
- **What kind of impact will you have on others?**

## Incorporating Strengths and Values

As you move through medical school, you will be passively or actively developing a reputation. As you work with others, a theme is developed over time that communicates the kind of experiences people will have working with you. Steven R. Covey uses the analogy of an emotional bank account to discuss how to be more proactive in communicating this experience with your professional relationships. We'll use his thoughts here to supplement how to think about your authentic brand. He describes how deposits are made in the emotional bank account when people have a positive experience working with you. For example, when you deliver on a project or fulfill a commitment. On the other hand, withdrawals are made when a promise is not kept such as not showing up or not meeting a deadline. Covey's overall advice is to develop your reputation with others by making more deposits than withdrawals resulting in a positive balance in your emotional bank account. A simple example is the value of having a reasonably fast response-time over email versus being slow or non-responsive. Being responsive is a deposit and builds a positive reputation with others and the opposite is true when a person unresponsive in their communication. This emotional bank account is imperative as it relates to your reputation and authentic brand.

Applying this concept further, there are two areas where making positive emotional deposits can be applied for medical students that are not typically considered: (1) asking for help and (2) setting an agenda with mentors.

First, medical students don't typically ask for help. Perhaps it makes them feel that they are showing weakness and vulnerability by needing assistance. Regardless of the reason, asking for help can be a positive experience in creating stronger relationships that lead to making a deeper more meaningful connection. It should also be noted that the students who ask for help although obvious and simple, get answers, are able to do more, and pursue areas of interest more fully. This is especially important in the realm of making strong connections with faculty and future mentors.

Second, when meeting with a mentor, if you come prepared with an agenda and lead the meeting, it creates a deposit because the mentor knows what is needed and can focus their energy on helping you rather than trying to figure out the purpose for the meeting and what you need from them. For example, a student arrives at a meeting with their emergency medicine faculty mentor with a list of specific questions about lifestyle, schedule, challenges experienced in the profession, and asks about specific individuals who are doing research in their area of interest.

- **How can you start making deeper connections with others by asking for help or setting an agenda with mentors?**
- **What type of person do you want to be seen as?**
- **What do you want to be known for?**

## Archiving Your Stories

As stated earlier, stories have the potential to be memorable and leave lasting impressions on the people you share them with. After reading the past 15 pages dedicated to reflection, we have now reached the part where you begin to write stories that matter to you. This is a great spot to remember the golden question: What is the story that only I could tell? It is helpful to put a pin in your stories to make sure you can draw upon them later. Life can pass you by and unless you are noticing things as they happen, you will likely forget amazing stories you could tell a mentor, program director, or future opportunity. Business scholar Dr. Bob Quinn encourages journaling as a means to document experiences as they are happening as a means to tell these stories for future use. Examples include stories of teamwork, professional interests, work ethic, a passion project, or challenges you've overcome.

As you get into this habit of writing down your stories for yourself, you also build a habit of becoming a storyteller for others. The next section helps guide how to communicate your stories, both non-verbally and verbally.

- **What are the stories only you can tell?**
- **What stories highlight your strengths and values?**
- **What stories highlight the reputation you already have or want to make?**

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*"A word after a word after a word is power."*

*-Margaret Atwood, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Essayist*

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# Communicating Your Authentic Brand

After you have written down stories, applied your strengths and values, and worked on developing your reputation, you will now be able to start communicating your authentic brand. As stated earlier, efforts to communicate who you are must come from a place of integrity and bring your whole and best self into the process. There are two basic ways to help you communicate your brand, through actions and storytelling.

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*"I learn by going where I have to go."*

*-Theodore Roethke, Poet, Teacher, Pulitzer Prize Winner*

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## Taking Action

First, take action by paying attention to Covey's emotional bank account (see page 15) as it applies to the relationships you are forming. Being intentional in your efforts going forward will mean keeping promises by doing what you say you are going to do, paying attention to the strengths and talents you have (think of your Top 5 Strengths, see page 14) and finding ways to use them more often as you work with others. For example, volunteering to take on certain projects that align with one or more of your top 5 strengths such as if you are an achiever in a group who helps define action items, makes assignments so that the meeting has productive outcomes, helps organize the workload, and makes sure the meeting has a specific purpose that benefits the team.

- **What experience do you want people to have when they work with you? Think of three bullet points to describe what you want it to be like.**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **What strengths/talents can you use more often as you work in team settings**

## Telling Your Stories

Ultimately, storytelling in an interview is an effective way to let people know who you are. Steven Denning has an exceptional approach to what constitutes a well told story as it relates to your character. He advises that the stories you tell have a positive outcome, reflect your fundamental views, use humor and emotion, and don't over promote your qualities. To practice telling your stories, he recommends telling a sixty-second version of story to a friend using any of the stories you have already identified. After telling the story, review it for:

- **Relevance:** Does it reflect the kind of person you are to the audience you need to communicate this to?
- **Clarity:** Is your role in the story clear? Are your values (and strengths) clearly reflected in the story?
- **Distinctiveness:** Does the story reflect what is unique about you?
- **Consistency:** Is the story consistent with the way you conduct your life now?

Denning encourages repeating the process of telling the story to multiple people until it is refined and can be told comfortably in various settings. This will prepare you to use your stories with mentors and in interview settings.

- **How can you use stories to communicate who you are?**
  
- **How can you start using storytelling more often in your interactions with others?**

We started this guide with an interview scenario in which you were asked, **“So, tell me about yourself.”** Remember, if your response is too staged and memorized, you will sound robotic and stale. If your response is too improvised, you will sound unprepared and careless. Finding the threshold in between that has both structure and flow, is where you want to be. Luckily, you will have read this primer before responding so you don't have to fumble anxiously over your words. You will have contemplated and reflected on why you're in that room with the interviewer. You will be humbly confident in how you tell your story. You will have a story that is airtight with vignettes highlighting your strengths and values as well as impacts you've made rather than passively stating what you have done and the things have happened to you. Your story will have a sense of completeness to it. One that gives others a sense of your past, present, and future in ways that remind yourself and the interviewer that your story is about pursuing something that is ultimately more important than the residency spot you're vying for. Now go and find your unique stories!

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*“Our stories are what make the difference, and if we can tell them honestly, we can hope to help each other. In the end, we have nothing to offer each other but our stories.”*

*–Virginia H. Pearce, Author, Teacher, Spiritual Guide*

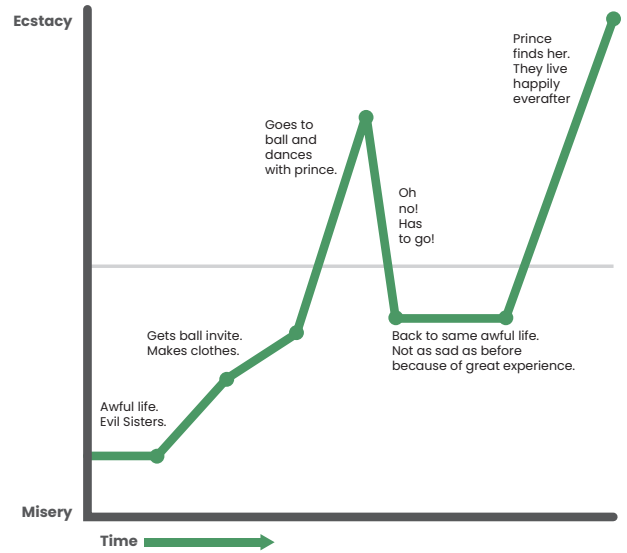
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# Appendix 1: Charting Your Life

Let's review the story of your life so far. What has been its ups and downs? It is often in the peaks and valleys where we can glean the most insight about ourselves and what we value.

In the chart below, draw a horizontal line. This line is not flat but has its ups and downs. When you were experiencing a challenging part of life, the line is below the mid-line. When you were experiencing a peak part of life, the line is above the mid-line. After you have drawn the line, label the highs and lows of the line with a short description of your life circumstances at the time.

When things were low, what was happening? What were the circumstances? When things were high, what was happening? Below the chart jot a short reflection about what causes the highs and lows for YOU.

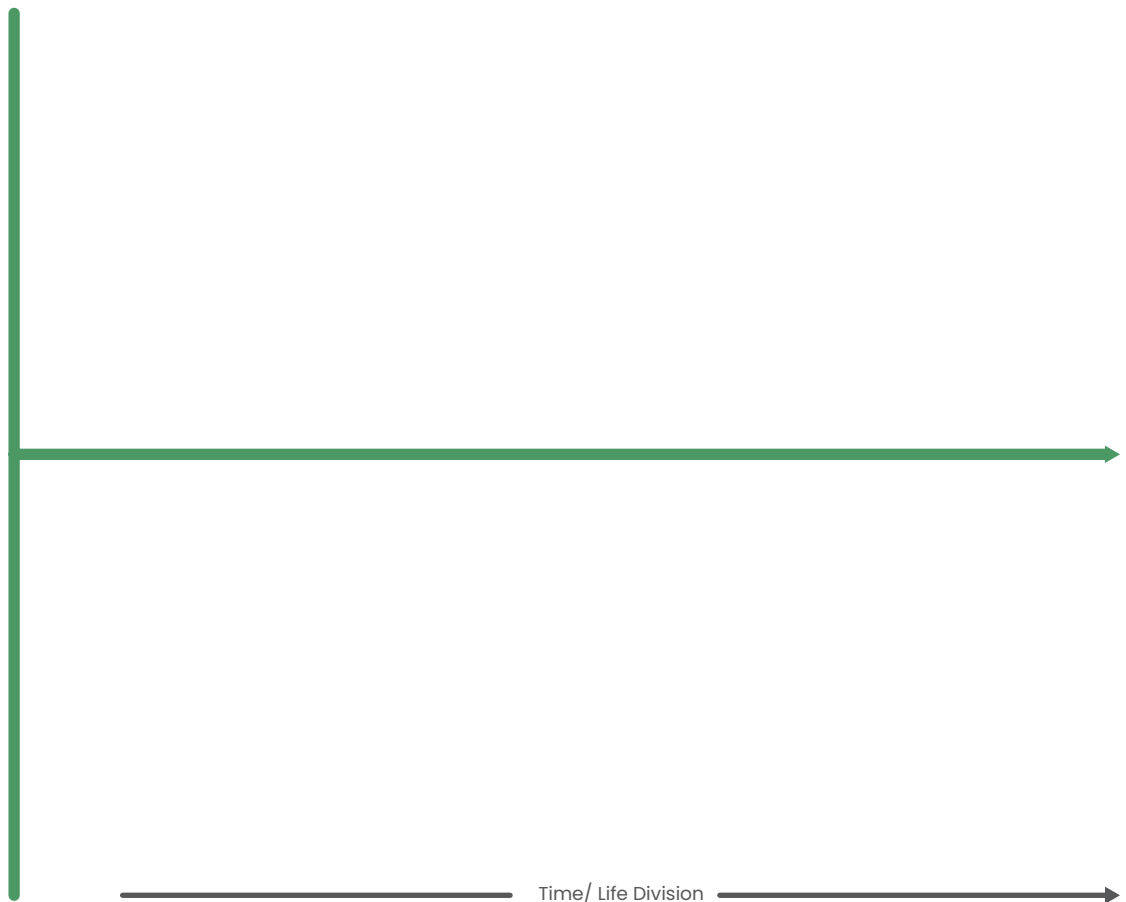


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Positive Experiences And Relationships

—

Negative Experiences and Relationships



**Reflections on my life story chart:**

# Appendix 2: Constructing Your Elevator Pitch

If you were to meet someone who is not familiar to you and you needed to explain who you are and what you did, what would you say? Mark Twain once remarked, “If you want me to give you a two-hour presentation, I am ready today. If you want only a five-minute speech, it will take me two weeks to prepare.” What if you only had 30 seconds?

The term “elevator pitch” paints a picture of a chance meeting with someone (possibly someone influential) where you have only a short time (the time of a short elevator ride) to convey a message that will influence the other person in some way.

How clearly and convincingly you can deliver the message about yourself during a short amount of time can serve to measure the refinement of our message and the clarity of our self understanding.

## Developing the Elevator Pitch

Because you never know when that chance-meeting will occur, the time to prepare your short “elevator pitch” is now. In the space below, you will have the chance to outline your general elevator pitch, where you introduce yourself. It’s useful to have your elevator pitch ready in some general form and to practice it whenever the opportunity presents itself as you are meeting others. It can take a number of iterations and much practice before it flows smoothly. You can also tailor the general elevator pitch to specific audiences and purposes.

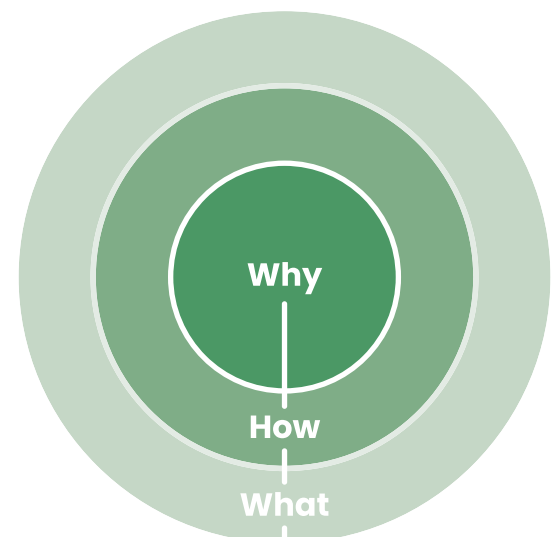
## The Structure of the Elevator Pitch

In Simon Sinek’s famous TED talk, he recommends that we start our communication with the “Why”. If we are communicating the “why” of what we do, the “how” of what we do, and the “what” of what we do, Simon recommends that we “Start with Why”.

When someone conveys their strongly-held “why”, it catches our attention and immediately becomes more memorable. Start with the strongest part of your message, which is the “why”. Why are you here doing what you do?

After the “why”, comes the “how”. What is the approach that you are taking? How is that different from others? Finally, after the “how”, comes the “what”. What are some projects you are doing that aligns with your “why” and “how”?

People tend to start with the “what” and then move on to the “how”, but they never really get to the “why”. A better structure is to start with the “why”. If your elevator pitch is around 30 seconds, then a good way to divide up the three parts of your message is to spend one-third of your time on the “why”, one-third of your time on the “how”, and one-third of your time on the “what”.



In the space below, please outline some of your main points relating to the “why”, “how”, and “what”. Your elevator pitch is the combination of those three elements, told in that order. The elevator pitch is between 30 seconds and one minute.

<p><b>“WHY”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the problem/ issue?</li><li>• Why is the problem/ issue important to address?</li></ul> <hr/>	<p><b>“HOW”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is causing the problem/ issue?</li><li>• How would you describe your (unique) approach?</li></ul> <hr/>	<p><b>“WHAT”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are you working on/ did you work on?</li><li>• What are you looking to do?</li></ul> <hr/>
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**The “Short Teaser”**

If shortening your message can have a focusing effect, what if the message was further reduced? After you have developed your 30-second elevator pitch. Condense your pitch down to a sentence or phrase which briefly describes who you are and what you do. This is your “short teaser”. In the space below, write down your short teaser.

[Dashed box for writing the short teaser]

**The “Core Idea”**

After you have developed your short teaser, further condense the message down to one to three words. This is your “core idea”. In the space below, write down the words of your core idea.

[Dashed box for writing the core idea]

# Appendix 3: Writing Your Memoir

Imagine for a moment that you are 85 years old. You're going to write a memoir, recounting your life, a successful and meaningful life where you did all the things that you set out to do. You're writing on the challenges that you had to face, the decisions that you had to face.

**What is the story that you will tell?**

**What are the main lessons that you will share?**

**What would be the title of this work?**

**What does that say about what is and is not important in your life now?**

