

Medical School Interviews After a Business Education

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Med school applicants come from a variety of backgrounds ranging from philosophy to art to biochemistry and engineering. When you thumb through premed and med school catalogs, every single one will tell you to major in what you enjoy or to get a liberal, broad education. Well, for those of you thinking of majoring in business or working for a couple of years, you should be ready for what the interview trail will throw at you.

No matter what, there will always be people, physicians, admissions committee members who will have some hang up about business people going into medical school. And honestly, there's nothing you can do about that perception. I don't have an MBA, but like all interviews you will get questions about your background. You will get asked about your business background, bank on it. You'll need to practice your spin. Obviously, it should be truthful but there also needs to be some finesse involved because you ARE trying to convince the interviewer that you want to go to medical school.

You will come across schools, committees, interviewers who will view your business background as a positive or a negative. One state school specifically stated that they want liberal arts majors (literature, music) and that "Technical, vocational (pharmacy), engineering, and business courses of study are not viewed as favorably as those providing a broad educational background". There's nothing you can do about these people. I got PLENTY of why medicine not business questions. PLENTY of HMO questions (despite the fact that I have never worked for an HMO) simply because these interviewers think business = insurance = greed. And then there are some who are really interested in your background and believe that it's an asset.

Obviously these things are random and so (as you know from Finance 101) you can diversify away this risk by applying to lots of schools and going to lots of interviews despite how good your numbers are. Schools with MD/MBA programs generally are more open to the idea of business people in medicine, while schools with a "mission" to crank out doctors who will work for free for people who can't pay will have one. But even this is too much of a simplification. There's simply no way you can tell because it all comes down to your interviewer.

My interviewing strategy was to emphasize the skills I learned in business and my job. I talked about being a self-starter, a team player, an organized coordinator with real world responsibilities, a good decision-maker. You can talk about honesty and ethical dilemmas at work (if you had a near whistleblowing moment) and talk about taking responsibility for your actions. When they hinted about going into medicine for the money, I would (kindly) inform them how much my supervisors made, and that I would actually be taking a pay cut by going into medicine (I'm doing primary care), but then come back and harp/lie about how much money doesn't matter and it's the job satisfaction that matters.

Anyways, just giving you some ideas to get your brain moving about the substance and style of your interview.

But yes, you will meet some people who have a disdain for Wall Street swindlers, ambulance chasers, and insurance scam artists. You also have to forgive many of your interviewers for their ignorance and educate them with your business suave and sophistication. Many academics and scientists don't know anything about "business" and therefore harbor contempt and fear for anyone in it. They don't realize that "business" ranges from starting a non-profit charity or hedging derivatives, to auditing off-shore accounts or running a 7-11. Hopefully, these people will cut you out before the interview so that you won't have to waste your time, money, and energy. Like many things during the interview, you will lose no matter what you say during the interview.

And then you'll get some really open minded, interested people who will encourage you **AT YOUR INTERVIEW**. My interviewer at my current med school asked me what they needed to do for me to rank them high, and I said, "Hey, just give me a chance and I won't disappoint you."

Every interviewer will have their own prejudices, whether it is against the biology, psychology, or business guy, so it's just a matter of luck. But the key is to have your story and to stick to it. No one will fault you for that.