

From MS2 to You: Advice I Wish I Knew

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During the Vietnam war, my parents embarked on a dangerous journey across the Pacific Ocean with the hope of a better life. They arrived in America with nothing and faced hardship, including poverty and lack of access to healthcare. As a first-generation American, I grew up listening to tough stories of their struggles. It developed in me deep gratitude for their sacrifices and empathy for the underserved population. Although most people in our generation cannot relate to their experience as refugees, we can all relate to the pursuit of wellness in our lives, especially physical health. My motivation to practice medicine is rooted in the belief that the healthcare field is one of the most meaningful professions in existence, with the ability to connect with and care for others at their most vulnerable. With such allure, the increase in selectivity and competitiveness of the application process is not surprising.

As a current second-year medical student, I recall my pre-medical student years as a UT Arlington biology major as a time of growing pain. I felt the pressure to prove myself as a worthy applicant and as a mature young adult exploring the field. Retrospectively, I could have avoided significant undue stress had I been more authentic, courageous, and graceful with myself.

Pave your path. One of the most common pitfalls of students pursuing medicine is comparing oneself to peers unfairly. The process of applying to medical school is inherently competitive, but admissions committees are most interested in getting to know you as an individual. Although the application for medical school may seem like a checklist of having all the right qualities of an applicant, the point is to accumulate experiences that further convince yourself that medicine is right for you. You might be thinking that it is impossible to stand out amongst other applicants, but your specific choices in activities contribute to your story and reflect your interests. An application that includes homeless outreach volunteering, free clinic volunteering, and mission trips demonstrates empathy for the underserved. An application with extensive student organization leadership experience, biology TA experience, and peer tutoring would demonstrate a love for mentorship. An application with extensive basic science and/or clinical research would demonstrate a desire to advance the future of medicine. Instead of allowing your expectation as to what a good pre-medical student should look like dictate your application, use it as an opportunity.

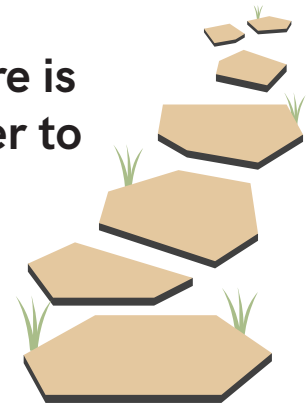


“Don’t let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game.” This is quite a cliché statement that we hear often, but it proves to be a very powerful statement when taken to heart. The answer to any question you do not ask will always be no. Think back to a time you went out on a limb, applied for something you thought you would never get, or did something out of your comfort zone. How amazing did it feel to accomplish that? For me, this came in the form of an internship that changed the trajectory of my pre-medical career. I applied and waited and waited. With no email or phone call, I sent four follow-up emails until I received an answer, and with my persistence, I became the only undergraduate intern in the Neurosurgery department of a prestigious medical school, yielding more than 10 journal publications. Asking for what we want and need is essential to success in our careers. We must have the courage to put ourselves out there, ask for what we want, and not be afraid of rejection, especially when it comes to our careers, because if there is one feeling worse than rejection, it is regret. So ask that professor for research, apply to that scholarship, and let your ambition run free.

Every failure is a step closer to success. As this process is competitive by nature, it is easy to become consumed by the stress that accompanies it. Throughout my pre-medical journey, I often caught myself measuring my self-worth as an inverse function of my failures. Every lackluster exam grade and program rejection sent me down a spiral of thoughts about never becoming a medical student and thereby never achieving my dream of becoming a doctor. Retrospectively, I wish that I gave myself more grace

because ultimately, failures only serve as stepping stones that bring us closer to success. As long as one learns from past mistakes and carries on purposefully, nothing can be considered a failure. It is also important to understand the context of your life and your limitations. For example, if you are a full-time student with a full-time job taking 21 hours in a semester, don’t beat yourself down if you end up getting a B that term. Yes, it is important to give your best towards any task you undertake, but failure is inevitable. Instead of looking at it as a defeat, look at it as a redirection.

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Ultimately, be bold, be persistent, be true to yourself, and never forget the experiences and people that got you to where you are today—your “why.” No matter what happens in your journey, don’t tie your self-worth to your outcome. Tie your self-worth to how you love others, your passions, your abilities, etc. The pre-medical years are tough, stressful, and long, but there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel. Your journey is shaped by every experience you encounter along the way, so remember to be intentional with your activities, chase opportunities without fear, and be graceful with yourself along the way.