

# The Continued Importance of a Personal Thank You Note

I read “Postinterview Communication: Strategies for a New Generation of Residency Applicants” in the August issue of the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education* with great interest.<sup>1</sup> As a physician who just completed residency and fellowship training and is now stepping into the role of an academic attending physician, the authors’ perspectives bring to light a few points of which I feel compelled to respond.

“Thank you notes are a specific subset of post-interview communication that deserves comment . . . However, this strategy can result in a significant workload for applicants . . .”<sup>1</sup> I have vivid recollections of coming home from long days of travel and interviews, only to sit down, exhausted, yet still taking the time to write personal thank you notes, which sometimes took hours.

Being born in the mid-1980s, I am technically a “Millennial.” But there is a big divide within Generation Y in the way we interact and communicate with others, with exposure to technology and social media being likely influences for how we go about it. This was a point the authors raised as a reason for continued postinterview communication from applicants despite instruction from program directors not to do so: “. . . Millennials still may worry that they should engage in it, based on the fear that other applicants may be doing it. In the age of social media, the ‘fear of missing out’ often is amplified . . .”<sup>1</sup>

I grew up spending much of my nonschool time outside. I did not get my first cell phone until I was a senior in high school, and my social media use is limited to Facebook—admittedly its main utility is to receive birthday reminders for friends. Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, these are apps I do not use. Individuals currently in medical school, who make up the later years of Generation Y and the start of Generation Z, more likely grew up surrounded by iPads, smartphones, and social media. Their views on residency postinterview communication may be different than that of my cohort by virtue of what they

see as the fundamentals of communication. Likely, they definitely grasp the significance of the residency interview as a career-defining moment.

Looking back, I would write all of these thank you notes again. I did not write them out of fear of missing out or because I hoped it would elevate my rank list position. I was savvy enough to realize that if there was any postinterview communication, it was to be taken with, at best, cautious optimism. Instead, I wrote the notes because it was my way of properly conveying my gratitude for this opportunity at a major point in my life. Each interview could signify the beginning of the most important journey of my life—the path to becoming a skilled, proficient, and compassionate physician, tools this program and its teachers would equip me with going forward. For something as monumental as this, a personal thank you note was a way to place formal closure to a possibly life-defining moment while simultaneously conveying to the recipient that I understood its meaning.

I agree that thank you notes are very time consuming, and that medical students’ time is already spread thin. But I hope the younger half of Generation Y, and Generation Z to follow, feel personally compelled to do so. Not for a hidden agenda, but because they realize the importance of the opportunity at hand at the precipice of residency training. Writing a thank you note is a small way of communicating a sentiment of gratitude, in the individual’s own unique way.

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## Reference

1. Deiorio NM, Schneider BN. Postinterview communication: strategies for a new generation of residency applicants. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2018;10(4):409–410.