

The Amazing Race: On Surviving a No-Match Result

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As just about anyone who has been through it can tell you, applying for predoctoral Internship is the ultimate multi-tasking challenge—and in my opinion, worthy of a prime-time reality television show all its own! If reality cameras could closely follow the applicant, what a fascinating sample of human behavior the world would see. Millions of viewers could observe him

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or her diligently studying, researching, and working to help people live better lives. Then, the competition intensifies as the person begins applying for

internship, a process equivalent to a part-time job. Such a TV show might aptly be called *“Internship, the Amazing Race!”*

I have not had much time for popular culture since becoming a graduate student, but my personal match day reality could aptly be summed up as *“Survivor: Lost in Cognitive Distortions.”* When I didn’t match, I actually thought for a brief moment that something was wrong with the NMS computer! As reality sank in, my brain spun out of balance with irrational thoughts as I considered possible reasons for this outcome. I proceeded to mentally grind them at all hours, considering, attributing, and discarding reasons for failure one by one. My brain scanned images of the people I’d met, e-mails, and phone calls. I recalled interview questions, second guessing my responses. My mood spiraled into the zone of hopelessness as I pondered questions like “What if I don’t match next year?” and “I’ll never graduate.”

I wish I could report that I matched to an Internship site through the Clearinghouse but that was not the case. Paradoxically, working through Clearinghouse openings helped improve my mood. I noticed that positions listed in the Clearinghouse were disappearing almost as quickly as they’d appeared, and postings didn’t stay open for long. Just

a couple of hours after applying for one position I received an e-mail saying “Thank you for applying to a position at our agency. We received applications from one hundred people and unfortunately, we can only hire one...” *Wait a MINUTE! One hundred applications two hours after opening?* I was beginning to see evidence that external factors beyond my control might also be at play in the system.

I’ve since learned that there were hundreds of other qualified applicants that were not matched. The “supply and demand” problem was discussed on the Match list serve. Several other applicants from my APA accredited program, whom I considered to be outstanding students with great credentials and experience, did not match. Eventually I decided to wait another year, and the need to make sense out of not matching faded into the background. I explored my options and found a great opportunity for more clinical experience. I received helpful feedback from interviewers. I leaned on friends in my program, making time to talk about our experiences. I spoke with my DCT about what to do differently the next time around.

At the time of this writing I am getting ready for the match again. I am concerned about the amount of time and effort that is involved, but I am prepared. Misgivings remain toward the process, which in my opinion is in need of major overhauls to keep student needs and time demands a priority. I volunteered to write about not matching because I know there are more than a few others, who like me, have had a cognitive distortion or two along the way (and it would be great to hear from you). While it’s still tempting for me to try to pin down one or several reasons why I didn’t match, I’ve found it easier to cope by focusing on more rational thoughts.

First, hold on to the vision, ideals and goals that brought you to this exciting place in your life. Protect your sense of self, remembering that your goodness and worth as a human being is not related to the match. You are qualified and ready to continue the process. Recognize and celebrate your strengths and your achievements. And lastly, as my ten year-old daughter reminds me frequently, remember that “The key to life is relaxation.” Slow down because it’s not a race, just one amazing journey. □

