

Professional Identity Fitting in and Standing Out

Early-career faculty physicians described the dual desires to fit in and stand out as important to establishing an identity as they transitioned to unsupervised practice.

Fitting in was expressed as feeling a sense of belonging at work, whereas Standing out was described as demonstrating expertise within a specific niche of practice.

Aspects of the work environment, including a culture of teamwork and collaboration, were important for early-career faculty physicians to feel like they fit in.

Organizing teams and workspaces facilitate belonging:

I think almost everything in Medicine is collaborative, and it's always the team because I'm not the only one ... it's always a team effort. That's the way it should be.

I like the teamwork. I really enjoy the banter we have in the work room and trying to figure out how we are going to attack the day efficiently to make sure we take care of everybody.

Early-career faculty physicians feel building relationships and camaraderie with other physicians create a sense of belonging to a broader professional community. The ability to easily connect with colleagues helped facilitate this relationship:

There is a real us. I think that the [disease-specific] group is a great group of people ... it's this great collegiality. I think as a group we sort of excel because we collaborate quite well.

[Y]ou can pick up the phone and call on your colleagues, even if they've been here for 30 or 40 years and speak to them on a 1-on-1 level and they'd be happy to talk to you.

Early-career faculty physicians highlight the importance of standing out from peers in the process of PIF. Expertise in a specific area of practice was a way they could distinguish themselves from their colleagues:

I've always liked having a slightly different skill set that I can bring in knowing that most docs don't have QI [quality improvement] skill sets. [I]t's nice to be able to bring that in knowing that among those who do,

Carving out a niche of practice increased the likelihood of being retained on staff:

You're trying to develop your own line of things and identifying new therapeutic targets, so people kind of see you in a different angle.... It's important to have your own identity ... you have to find something or a niche. If you want to stay on staff, you probably have to develop a niche and an identity at the same time.

Having a niche created a sense of both fitting in and standing out:

[I]t was a great fit because it's me and his data scientists and statisticians and economists, and I'm the clinician, and I kind of forged my niche again as being the person who bridges the gap between all of the clinicians they partner with and the data scientists because I learned how to speak both languages.

The desires to fit in and stand out were not mutually exclusive, and early-career faculty physicians could satisfy both desires simultaneously.