

# Your First Job— What You Need to Know

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**S**pring—a time for rebirth and nature’s blooming—and also a time for senior orthopedic residents and fellows to each decide upon their first “real” job as an attending surgeon. For many a trainee, this decision is the most important choice in one’s young adult life (other than deciding on a life partner). Hence, it is fraught with both apprehension and, to quote Dickens’ Mr. Jagger, “great expectations.” As an orthopedic educator for more than 20 years, I have often been approached by a senior resident or fellow during this anxious period and have distilled my advice down to McCann’s three rules of “Your First Job—What You Need to Know.”

**My First Rule:** Ask your partner where he or she wishes to live. Simply asking acknowledges the complexities faced by couples in arranging their life together. Today this often involves the added challenges of a dual-profession household. For most of us in orthopedics, the first real job is the culmination of up to 14 years of focused, intense application. That professional focus continues as one builds a practice, but one’s outlook should broaden, if it hasn’t already, to embrace the needs of family and community (all that we refer to as “getting a life”). For those who are married or in committed relationships, this means addressing the needs and desires of your partner, who may have made career sacrifices during your training. Asking your significant other early on where he or she would like to live is fundamental to acknowledging and addressing those needs.

**My Second Rule:** Where do *you* wish to live? This, like the first question, seems self-evident, but not to trainees whose principal concern for the previous 10 or so years has been acquiring the knowledge and skills to become the best possible orthopedic surgeon. We are, by nature and selection, a compulsive group. Such a basic question forces one to consider the larger concerns beyond orthopedic practice that are a requisite to a fulfilling life: family, friends, and community. I am convinced that addressing such issues not only is necessary for



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a mature, thinking adult but also makes for a better doctor—a professional who understands and has experienced the essential decisions, emotions, and challenges of everyday life in addition to being a talented technician.

**My Third Rule:** Get a contract. I learned the hard way how important this is. Following my fellowship training, I had a verbal agreement to join an orthopedic surgeon in practice for what I believed was a great opportunity. For months I requested a contract but never received one. Since my future partner was an alumnus of my residency program and well known to my then chairman, I naively placed my trust in his handshake and verbal commitment. Needless to say, 1 week before I was to begin my first job, he called to rescind his offer, citing his accountant’s advice that it was “not a smart business deal.”

I trust that today’s savvy residents and fellows are doing their “due diligence” and use this exercise of contract review to ask themselves what it is they really want as well as to fully understand the job they are about to accept.

In this issue, **James G. Stuart, JD**, continues the journal’s series developed by **KarenZupko & Associates, Inc.**, nationally recognized experts in medical practice management. His article, “Before and Beyond the Contract,” offers some of the soundest advice I have come upon concerning all that should be explored when reviewing that first contract—or, for those more senior among us, *any* practice contract. I urge anyone considering joining a new practice to give this excellent piece a close read.

These days of seeking your first job may be among the most wonderful and most anxiety-provoking of your life. I hope that considering “McCann’s three rules” will assist you in making the best decision for a fulfilling life and a rewarding professional career.

Best of luck!

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