

INTERVIEW TIPS FROM THE INTERVIEWERS

-FOR LATERAL ATTORNEYS-

Practical, Real-World Interview Advice from Washington, D.C. Law Firm Attorneys and Recruiting Managers

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

"The most impressive interviewers are those who can clearly articulate why they are interested in our firm, with specific reasons that are based on research."

"Have a good answer ready when asked why you are seeking to leave your current job."

"Before your interview, look at your resume and think of questions you would ask if you were interviewing yourself. Then, have good answers ready for these questions."

"The best attorneys are good researchers. You should research each attorney you are meeting. I will never forget a litigator who took the time to read a recent opinion on which I was listed as the attorney of record. I wanted him on my team."

"Do not discount the importance of writing samples. Those that review them take them seriously. Make sure you are providing your best possible work and triple-check for typos and Bluebooking."

"Make sure your writing sample does not contain confidential or privileged information. Also, don't unnecessarily redact information that is not confidential or privileged, as this shows you don't know the rules. If in doubt, check the local rules."

"If you have friends at our firm, call them to find out the inside scoop. They can give you helpful information."

"Read the recent press releases on our website."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS/ETIQUETTE

"Being late is the kiss of death. Assume the interview is going to begin 30 minutes before the actual time, and grab a cup of coffee if you arrive early."

"Be polite and courteous to support staff such as secretaries, front desk receptionist, etc. They often have the ear of decision makers and will not hesitate to provide informal feedback on you, especially if you are not respectful."

"Turn off your cell phone. Get a haircut. For men, wear a dark suit, a white/blue shirt and red/blue tie. Take off that strange looking high school ring. No one will appreciate your unique fashion sense. Don't give people something weird to remember you by two months later when they're trying to remember who you are and whether you deserve an offer."

"Do not look at your watch during interview and turn cell phone off. Good eye contact is key."

"The more you are relaxed and at ease, the more the interviewer will be relaxed and at ease."

"If your hands tend to get sweaty, keep a handkerchief in your pocket. There's nothing worse than clam hands."

"For both men and women, a firm handshake and winning smile is important. It is your first chance to show confidence. I have written people off immediately after their limp hand shake."

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

"Start a conversation with your interviewer before they have a chance to ask a question. Facilitate a conversation and not an interrogation or deposition."

"If you are an associate, focus on impressing the partners, but focus on bonding with the other associates as a friend. I don't want to hire somebody who will make me look bad."

"If you are changing cities, you should be able to show your connection to the new city and you're your demonstrated interest in living there. For example, how many times have you visited, have you lived there, etc."

"It is much better to preemptively bring up and explain any weaknesses in your background."

"If you have received very good performance evaluations, it is your responsibility to make it known to us because we may not want to ask and risk making you feel uncomfortable."

"Remember that the easiest topic to ask someone (interviewer) is about him/herself - people naturally like to proselytize about their own accomplishments. Ask why we joined this firm, why we like it, etc."

"You will be asked to talk about your prior experiences, so be prepared to discuss each and every detail of your resume."

"Some of us are not good interviewers and we get nervous as well. If necessary, it never hurts to take the lead and help carry the interview with somebody that is not doing a very good job."

"The more laughter during an interview and the more we like you personally, the more we will overlook your weaknesses and play up your strengths. It happens all the time."

"The more the questions relate to the interviewer's personal experiences—as opposed to administrative-type issues—the better."

"Be careful with asking questions that shed the firm in a negative light. You can ask questions about things that you are concerned about, for example a merger or practice group leaving a firm, but balance those questions with questions about things you feel are positive aspects of the firm."

"Avoid questions that deal with money, vacation, part-time, billable hour minimums, etc. Find this out on our firm's website or informally."

"If you really don't know the answer to a question just say, 'I really don't know the answer.'"

"Save your negative-type questions, such as 'What do you not like about this firm?' until after you receive an offer. That way, we can't ding you for being negative."

"Remember that partners are joint owners in the firm - when someone points out weaknesses in their firm, they take it personally."

"Associates are more honest when they are speaking with you outside the actual office."

"Don't let your guard down at lunch."

"Do not feel you need to over explain things you perceive as weaknesses about yourself.... Have an answer ready, but do not go on and on about it."

"Assume that everything you say to each interviewer will be discussed and compared by each of the interviewers when you're gone, and scrutinized for inconsistencies."

"If an interviewer initiates a debate on a legal issue, don't get too passionate and heated about defending your position. Remain calm, composed, and focus on making logical sense."

"Realize that the law firm needs you as much as you need them. Don't come across as needy or having low self-esteem."

"Unlike interviews during law school, remember that the firm really needs help because they can't handle their workload."

"The more you focus on how your skills and experience can help make our lives easier, the better."

POST-INTERVIEW

"I recommend that they not call repeatedly when someone is not answering. We have caller ID and it is 'stalker-ish' to see a person call 40 times in a row."

"Don't get too hung up on thank-you notes. If you want to write one, email is fine. Just make sure there are no typos and you don't write the same thing to each person."

"In a thank-you note, don't say you think you're a 'perfect fit' after an initial interview. It's too early and questions your sincerity."

"If you are anxious about a possible offer, don't call to 'check in' unless you have a good reason for doing so, such as another pressing offer."