

## ***INTERVIEW PREPARATION***

## PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Your qualifications on paper were sufficient to merit an interview. Now the employer wants to know more about you to determine if you are a "match" for his/her firm or organization. This is also an opportunity for you to interview the employer to determine if this is the right environment for you.

**Remember to take a writing sample, a copy of your transcript and extra resumes to every interview.** You will also want to participate in a mock interview with the Office of Professional Development prior to an interview with an employer.

Know your resume! Oftentimes in interviews a prospective employer may ask a question about an item on your resume such as an organization with which you were associated in college or a previous work experience. Be prepared to discuss your resume in detail – you may need to discuss the kinds of work you performed.

Good posture is important. In the interview make sure to sit up straight and make good eye contact when answering questions. This will give the impression that you are confident in your abilities and that you don't have anything to hide.

A little nervousness during the beginning of your interview is okay and even expected. However, you need to get over the initial apprehension so that it doesn't affect the quality of your interview. Adequate preparation before the interview may help to alleviate some of the nervousness. **Understand that as an attorney (and a professional) you will be judged on how well you work, act and respond under pressure.**

Like it or not, how you look influences people when they first meet you. If you tend to be sloppy, the interviewer may think you don't care much about yourself. The attention you pay to your appearance is a compliment to the interviewer. The small details (such as polished shoes) will imply you are careful, an important trait for attorneys.

Do clothes really make a difference? **Yes.** Interviewers are more comfortable with applicants who dress in a neutralizing and not a distracting factor. Your appearance should be both conservative and professional.

- A tailored, well-pressed navy, charcoal, or black suit for women is the standard in the legal industry.
- Carry extra materials in a leather portfolio.
- Men should wear a matching belt and shoes, dark socks, and a silk tie in a solid color or with a subtle or stripe pattern.
- Women should wear closed toe pump shoes, pantyhose (if a skirt suit) and minimal jewelry and make-up. Women with long hair may want to pull their hair back away from their face.

Part of the overall appearance will be your approach to employers. A steady handshake, good eye contact and an enthusiastic greeting (please check the pronunciation of employer's name in advance) will get the interview off to a good start.

## INTERVIEW “DO’S” AND INTERVIEW “DON’TS”

- **DON’T**
  - Be Late – be there *at least* 15 minutes early
  - Have anything in your mouth – No gum, cigarettes, etc...
  - Fidget – No tapping, scratching, adjusting clothes, etc...
  - Call people by their first name (unless asked to)
  - Swear / Use slang
  - Try to be funny – Be pleasant, but serious.
  - Make speeches
  - Give one to two word answers
  - Lie
  - Get angry/irritated
  - Talk about salary (unless it’s brought up)
  
- **DO**
  - Research the employer and interviewers – be familiar with practice areas, major clients, etc.
  - Turn off/silence any gadgets you have with you before the interview
  - Get a good night’s sleep the night before
  - Maintain good eye contact with your interviewer
  - Wear clothing that conceals any tattoos/piercings that you may have
  - Know how to correctly pronounce the interviewer’s name.
  - Put a positive spin on your responses – no one likes a killjoy!
  - Ask for business cards from the people you meet
  - Ask when you’ll hear back from the firm/organization
  - Be aware of current events – You may be asked a question involving them

## QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED BY LEGAL EMPLOYERS

A very common question will be, "Tell me a little about yourself." If you are ready for this question, you have an excellent opportunity to sell your strongest attributes and skills. Begin with your early background such as where you grew up and what schools you attended. Move on to your work experience, highlighting a few significant achievements. Summarize with an explanation of why you chose a legal career. Interviewers are expecting a two to three minute answer, but are not very interested in hearing you verbalize your entire resume.

Employers want to know if you have a legitimate interest in their community. They frequently ask, "Why are you interested in practicing in our city?" Do your homework so you are capable of commenting on the positive aspects of the employer's city. If you can tie in your experiences from a visit and/or have friends in the area, your response will be stronger.

"What would you like to know about our firm?" is a key question. Your questions about the firm may be a tip-off to the employer that you really do have a strong interest in their particular firm. They listen for questions that indicate a knowledge of the firm and that focus on the nature of the firm's practice. Other questions you might ask could address training and supervision of new hires, evaluation of performance, pro bono work and requirements for partnership.

Seventy-five members of the ABA's Economics of Law Practice Section were asked to give a brief explanation of why they asked the questions they most frequently asked. A few questions they listed and the reasons behind them follow:

**Q:** What do you think you will do best/worst as a lawyer?

**R:** Often we are our own worst critics, and if an applicant believes he or she does something well/poorly, he or she probably does.

**Q:** What has been your least favorite class in law school? Why?

**R:** To determine possible lack of interest and ability. Additionally, it tests an applicant's ability to present a reasoned explanation in response to what is virtually always a "surprise" question.

**Q:** What do you believe is a fair starting salary?

**R:** To determine if your expectations are too high.

**Q:** What do you expect to be doing five years from now?

**R:** To determine your level of ambition.

**Q:** Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work or at school. What happened, who was involved, and what did you do in terms of problem solving?

**R:** To determine your ability to work under stressful situations

**Q:** What types of experiences have you had talking with clients?

**R:** To determine oral & written communication skills.

## **QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO ASK LEGAL EMPLOYERS**

Legal employers assess the candidate's strengths and weaknesses and want to know the candidate's priorities and potential for development. You will need to do the same as you investigate each employer.

The sample questions that follow will be appropriate depending on the size of employer and the position available. However, check the firm's website before asking these questions. If this information can be easily found online, you might not make a good impression asking the question.

- What training is provided for a new clerk/summer associate or attorney?
- Are offers extended by a particular department or group?
- How, and how often, is work assigned to a new hire?

- What percentage of summer clerks typically receive offers for permanent employment?
- How is the work of clerk/summer associate/attorney evaluated?
- How did you end up practicing with this law firm?
- Are new attorneys assigned to a group immediately upon joining the firm or does the firm have a rotation system?
- What are the factors and criteria used for promotion to partner?
- What is expected from a new attorney for client development?
- What continuing education, community involvement and activity in the bar association is expected from new hires?
- What is the firm/agency's strategic plan for the future?
- How does the firm/agency market its services?
- What trends in law will affect the firm/agency?
- What is the firm/agency's management structure?
- Why did you (interviewer) select this area of practice and/or geographic location?
- What is the next step? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

## **CALL-BACK INTERVIEWS**

When you receive a call-back invitation, respond as quickly as possible to the employer by scheduling the interview or declining the invitation. If you decide you are not interested in the employer, help the employer (and your fellow students) by declining the invitation promptly.

Large and mid-size firms generally pay your expenses involved with the interview process. Ask the recruiting coordinator or hiring administrator how you should handle transportation, hotel and meals. Small firms, judges and government agencies generally do not reimburse interview expenses.

Call-back interviews normally include a set of interviews throughout the morning and afternoon. Each person you interview with will be providing you with different information and looking for different skills and personality traits. Be prepared for an interview situation where you are expected to ask all of the questions. (You can impress someone with good questions much more than with answers, so make sure you think through this scenario beforehand)

On a call-back interview, there is more often than not a meal involved. Hiring members want to interact with you on a social level to ascertain your social/people/interaction skills and make sure you are a good “fit” with the firm. Be mindful of dining etiquette.

## A Sample Employer Evaluation Form—How will you rate?

Please answer the following questions by circling a number on the scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent):

	<u>poor</u>	<u>excellent</u>
<b>1. Student's preparation for the interview:</b>		
Student had researched and was familiar with our practice and office	1	2 3 4 5
Student demonstrated an interest in our office and practice	1	2 3 4 5
Student asked informed questions about our office	1	2 3 4 5
Comments:		
<b>2. Professional demeanor:</b>		
Student shows career direction and focus	1	2 3 4 5
Student was responsive to questions	1	2 3 4 5
Student demonstrated good oral communication skills	1	2 3 4 5
Student possesses self-confidence	1	2 3 4 5
Student demonstrated good analytical ability	1	2 3 4 5
Student was well-groomed and wore appropriate business attire	1	2 3 4 5
Student's overall first impression	1	2 3 4 5
Comments:		
<b>3. Student's application materials:</b>		
Resume layout and appearance	1	2 3 4 5
Key points of resume stand out	1	2 3 4 5
Resume is detailed and action-oriented	1	2 3 4 5
Cover letter was clear and concise	1	2 3 4 5
Writing sample demonstrates good legal writing ability	1	2 3 4 5

## Dealing with Rejection

The job search is an exhilarating experience but it also can be a humbling one. You are likely to get rejected repeatedly - but it only takes one acceptance letter! Don't bother feeling dejected when the rejection letters begin to arrive, which they will. All job candidates from all schools receive rejections!

If your job search begins to feel like a dead end, re-evaluate your goals and the methods you are using to reach them. Ask faculty, law professionals and the Office of Professional Development staff to assist you in evaluating your resume, letter, writing sample and interview techniques. Talk about your experiences with others; don't go through the entire process alone!