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By Suzanne Dupree Howe, Esq.
Managing Director, BCG Attorney Search,
Houston

The Interview Post-Mortem: Don't Forget Your Thank You Notes!!

So, you spent the afternoon interviewing for a position as a possible lateral associate position. It's 8 p.m. and you're just settling in for a date with your DVR and the latest episode of American Idol, when you start to get the nagging sense that you have forgotten something...something related to the utterly exhausting afternoon you spent interviewing. From the recesses of your fatigued brain comes the memory of sending thank you notes after your interviews in law school. But could it still be true? Do you *still* have to send thank you notes after interviews? After all, you've been practicing for awhile now. Do you still have to resort to these measures to get the job? The answer is an unequivocal "YES!"

But let's explore why you should send thank you notes. Undoubtedly, there are associates who interview and get the job with nary a thank you note sent. But ask yourself this, "Is it the classy thing to do? Is it a sincere and kind act? AND could sending a thank you note help my chances in getting this job?"

Will sending thank you notes help your chances in securing the position? According to CareerBuilder, "Nearly 15 percent of hiring managers say they would not hire someone who failed to send a thank-you letter after the interview. Thirty-two percent say they would still consider the candidate, but would think less of him or her." Think of thank you notes as part of your "campaign" to get the job. A failure to send them could actually hurt your chances!

A thank you note can set you apart from other candidates. Let's say you're the head of the corporate practice group at a large law firm and you just interviewed two really stellar candidates. Both had simply terrific interviews, but you only have one offer to give. The next day you receive a sincere handwritten note written on beautiful stationery from one of the candidates. This candidate, in her note, in essence has asked for the job and expressed her extreme interest in the position. In this partner's experience, highly interested candidates end up working very hard and doing tremendous work. At this point, the partner begins to lean towards this candidate and gives her the offer.

A thank you note can remind the firm of your candidacy. If you are one of ten candidates who interviews for a position, then it will become difficult for the interviewers to clearly remember you and the answers you gave during the interview. Sending a thank you note is a good opportunity to remind the firm of your candidacy and to make a stronger impression in their minds.

Thank you notes give you an opportunity to ask for the job. Now I'm not saying that you need to be highly aggressive or pushy in your thank you notes. But you should mention that you would really like the position and why. When I help my candidates with interview preparation, I often tell them to make sure that, as a closing note, they express their interest in actually receiving an offer. Firms *like* to hear that you are interested, as well. It's a two-way street! And a thank you note is another venue for you to get this point across. Furthermore, it is also the very last chance you have to make an impression.

The e-mail vs. handwritten note conundrum. I probably get this question the most these days. Are e-mailed thank you notes appropriate in this day and age? Various opinions abound, leading many candidates to be confused. In short, *either is fine*.

I happen to think handwritten notes make a great impression and also show that the candidate spent more time on the note's composition. But while a handwritten note will gain you serious style points a la Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, it does lack speed. There is no doubt that e-mails are a much faster alternative. And if a firm indicates

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that they will be making a quick decision, I actually suggest e-mailing thank you notes in this instance. Furthermore, not everyone has a big box of Crane's personalized stationery sitting in their desk. If you don't have thank you notes on hand, do NOT wait to send them until you've bought a box. Just send the e-mails.

Further, if writing out the handwritten notes is so daunting that you think it might actually prohibit you from doing it, then you've got to go with e-mails. Also, ask yourself this, do people often compare your handwriting to a prescribing physician's? Then do the reader a favor and e-mail your note.

Even if you don't receive the offer or even want one, sending a thank you note can be a good networking opportunity. It's very possible you may not end up working for the firm where you interviewed for whatever reason, but an interview is a great way to make contacts and expand your network. You never know where people will ultimately end up, and it's possible that a partner could transition to your current firm and you could end up working for them anyway. You would want that person to have a favorable opinion of you, right? Friendly relationships can get you a long way in the law. Furthermore, it just makes good business sense to have strong contacts in a variety of firms and corporations. A thank you note helps continue and strengthen that relationship.

So, what are the rules for sending thank you notes then?

1. Do not send the same note to every person. Vary it. I have heard many attorneys say that they compare notes with their colleagues to see if the candidate wrote the same one to every person.
2. Try to send thank you notes as soon as possible.
3. Thank the recruiting coordinator. A lot of attorneys forget this and a good recruiting coordinator can have a lot of power in hiring decisions.
4. If you are only going to send one thank you note, then thank the hiring partner or the partner with whom you spent the most time.
5. Don't say you're a "perfect fit" after a screening interview. You don't have enough information at this point and you will look foolish or naïve.
6. Be formal, but keep it brief.
7. If sending a handwritten note, use good paper. If you don't have good monogrammed paper at this point in your career, then add this purchase to your to do list. Style points can go a long way when interviewing.
8. Spell check. Spell check. Spell check. If you are handwriting your notes, then you need to be doubly sure that you aren't misspelling something. Consider typing out what you want to say in Microsoft Word before transcribing to your note. If you don't show attention to detail in your thank you notes, then how might your work product look?
9. Focus on content and avoid too many adjectives. Tell the reader what you gained from the interview instead and what appeals to you about their practice.

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