

Interview Preparation Techniques

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Introduction

Preparation is the key to successful interviewing! The interview format is essentially a question-and-answer session, with the interviewer asking most of the questions. We cannot predict exactly what will be asked, but certain questions do come up over and over again. It is to your advantage to prepare general answers to these questions on the following pages.

The Interview

The interview is a business meeting between two professionals regarding the value you can provide to the firm and how you will fill a designated opening at the firm. It is not adversarial, nor is it a test of wills. It is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your ability to think clearly, articulate concisely, and listen—factors that are considered to be the basis for your (hopefully) excellent academic credentials and future job performance at the firm.

It is critical to always remember that you are there to sell yourself by demonstrating why you can best fill the open position the firm has and

why you will add value to the firm both as a lawyer and as a good person. You only get one chance to sell yourself. You have to use that chance for all it's worth!

Some Common Questions

When answering most questions, think in terms of two-minute answers. Normally, two minutes is plenty of time to give sufficient information and detail to fully answer the question (and allow the interviewer to ask more detailed follow-up questions if desired) and you will not bore the interviewer (watch for the telltale glazed eyes). After you have answered the question to your satisfaction, be quiet. If the interviewer remains quiet and you are uncomfortable, then you should ask a question. Don't continue your answer; it will sound as if you are making excuses.

Now, let's look at some common questions.

Tell me a little about yourself. An icebreaker, this directive allows you to briefly review your professional background, discuss your reasons for entering the field of law (if



appropriate), and draw a correlation between your personal and work styles and the firm's “personality” and expertise. (Most people are uncomfortable with this question. Don't be. It is actually a good opportunity to briefly tell the interviewer important points you want him/her to be aware of.)

How did you do in law school? Summarize what most excited you about the curriculum, honors, and pertinent extracurricular activities and how law school helped you discover more about your professional goals. Cite your academic standing if it's impressive. Don't be embarrassed about your grades if they are not stellar; but if they are not, be sure to talk about your other activities in and out of school. If you worked during school, tell your interviewer.

What do you know about our firm? We will, of course, give you whatever information we

have about the firm and the open position. Nonetheless, to the extent possible, you should also research the firm's success stories and its history and philosophy.

Why do you find our firm attractive? Talk about the factors that interest you about the firm—the people, type of work, firm structure, etc. If you know any of the firm's projects that match your expertise, express a desire to contribute to those projects. Recognize several of the firm's achievements and, if possible, the distinctions of its senior partners.

Why are you leaving your present position? Discuss your interest in a) increased responsibility and challenge, b) a firm that offers real growth, and c) committing to a team that understands the demonstrated value of your skills. Never bad-mouth your current boss or firm; it will hurt you.



What would the partners you are working with say about your strengths and weaknesses? The answer to this question is clearly affected by your relationship with these partners. Please talk with us about this question.

Tell me about your research expertise and client interaction. In a straightforward and modest manner, you must sell yourself here. Specifically and succinctly describe your major assignments and your contributions to their success. Illustrate how you handled a sensitive client matter, without divulging confidential information. Be specific about your work—specifics sell—and think about projects you've been involved in before you get to the interview.

Why do you think you're right for this position? Restate your qualifications and reiterate the relationship between your credentials and the job description. Remember, you're not just saying you are a good lawyer and a good person, you are saying you're a good lawyer and a good person for this firm and this opening.

Describe your most challenging assignments and the ones you liked least. The interviewer is hunting for strengths and weaknesses. Demonstrate your problem-solving abilities and how you handle the details and monotony entailed in any job, no matter how high its level.

Assuming we hire you, where do you see yourself in five years? In 10 years? Express your short- and long-term goals and position yourself both as a future leader of this firm and as an individual willing to learn from

peers and partners. You are a professional in it for the long haul; you want to make a career investment in the firm and become the best lawyer you can be. (We do not think this is a good question, because it typically doesn't help you, and often can hurt you, should you express any doubt in regard to your career aspirations. Your goal should be to become the best lawyer you can and eventually be made partner. It's possible your goals may change in the future, but there is no need to discuss that now. Remember, your interviewer probably doesn't know where he or she will be in 5 or 10 years either!)

How would you characterize your personality? This is designed to throw you off balance. Highlight your strengths, and never become defensive. If you feel compelled to offer up a weakness, pick one that actually translates into a strength—perhaps a tendency to push yourself a little too hard or to be too detail-oriented.

As you meet different members of the firm, you'll be asked some of these questions again. Provide the same responses to each interviewer.

Unlikely Questions

While it is unlikely that you will be asked any of the following questions, if you are indeed faced with one of these and you are uncomfortable answering, you may wish to prepare a polite general response such as: “That question doesn't seem related to the position under discussion or the performance of my responsibilities as a lawyer.”

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- *Are you married?*
 - *Do you have or plan to have children?*
 - *Would you like to go out?*

Questions You Should Ask

At some point during the interview, your interviewer will ask if you have any questions. Your questions should target the open position and demonstrate your interest in broad issues affecting the company/firm's clients and expertise. Consider asking some of these questions, as appropriate:

- *What are the responsibilities of the position in terms of client and partner contact, research, management, and independent decision making?*
- *How many people would I be working with?*
- *How big is the department?*
- *How do you assign work?*
- *If I meet your expectations, what **career growth** can I reasonably expect?*
- *How would you characterize the style and philosophy of the firm?*

Do not ask about salary, maternity leave and other benefits, start date, vacations, or working hours.

Practice giving your responses to questions and posing your own questions well ahead of the meeting in mock interviews, using us, a spouse, or a friend to role-play the prospective employer. Work with a tape recorder or video camera so that you can objectively evaluate your answers and your body language.

Look out for verbal or physical mannerisms that are distracting and correct those that can

be corrected in time. These include pulling at a mustache; twirling a ring; nodding your head; shifting frequently in your chair; and using "well," "okay," and "yeah."

Carefully plan and scrutinize your wardrobe. As a general rule of thumb, if you are not sure certain clothes are appropriate, don't wear them. Err on the side of conservatism. You must appear to be a winner. Try to get eight hours of sleep the night before, and eat a substantial and nourishing breakfast the day of the meeting. You need be functioning at 100% efficiency.

Having prepared for your interview, you are ready to present your credentials, to go for the offer, and to learn as much as possible about yourself and the firm from the experience.

The interview doesn't end with the final handshake. Call us as soon as the interview is complete.

Together, we will thoroughly evaluate what transpired. Evaluation should include your honest and thoughtful responses to these questions:

- What was the primary quality of the interview that first comes to mind?
- Was there "chemistry" between you and the interviewer?
- What did you learn about the firm, its leaders, and the position that could be useful should you be asked back for a second round?
- Did you convey your relevant skills, talents, and accomplishments? What additional information do we need to provide you?

- Are you still interested in the job? What are your reservations?
- Did your body language communicate ease?
- Was your voice firm and strong?
- Did any verbal mannerisms sabotage your presentation?
- Did your wardrobe work?
- Did any questions stump you?

Summary of Dos and Don'ts

- Sell yourself (nobody else can!). Don't be shy or overly modest.
- Let the interviewer run the interview. (Of course, if the interviewer allows time for you to ask questions, you should do so.)
- Never interrupt the interviewer.
- Listen to the question, and think about your answer before answering (i.e., outline your answer in your head). Give the same answer to each interviewer who asks the same question.
- Look the interviewer straight in the eye.
- Don't fidget.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Don't let the interviewer provoke you into an emotional response you may regret later.
- Remember, every answer can be a two-edged sword. (For example, if you say you want to leave your current position because of lack of training, your interviewer may get the impression you have insufficient training to fill the firm's open position.)
- Think of the interview as a chance to tell your story, generally starting with law school

“Remember, your objective is to elicit an offer. At the end of the interview, express your interest in the position and the firm. Rehearse your expression of this interest, aiming for enthusiasm tempered by professional restraint.”

- and ending with your having demonstrated (through answers to individual questions) why your schooling, experience, and personality "fit" with this firm.
- Don't feel you must have every question you have about the firm answered immediately. You will have the opportunity to ask tough, insightful questions after you have received an offer.

- If your interview includes lunch, don't eat a heavy lunch. It will put you to sleep during your next interview.
 - When answering most questions, think in terms of two-minute answers. After you have answered the question to your satisfaction, be quiet! Don't continue your answer. It will sound as if you are making excuses!
- Remember, your objective is to elicit an offer. At the end of the interview, express your interest in the position and the firm. Rehearse your expression of this interest. Aim for enthusiasm, tempered by professional restraint. You don't want to appear overeager or anxious. Don't be ambivalent. Even if you have concerns, the interview is not the place to let them show. Tell us about your concerns.

There is no magic to successful interviewing. Preparation ahead of time will result in a much higher success rate. Law firms interview in phases—initial interview, callback, possibly a second callback, and then a decision is typically made. Don't look ahead of the phase

you are in. Concentrate on successfully completing that phase. Only then should you look to the next. Remember, interviewing should be fun, not a chore! If you are enthusiastic about yourself and have fun, your interviewer will probably feel the same.

Additional resources

Top Ten Interview Questions

Interviewing Tips

Top 23 Law Firm Interview Tips: How to Excel in Law Firm Interviews

21 Major Interview Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs

The Best Way to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews

How to Talk about Other Interviews in Your Interviews

How to Answer the Tell Me About Yourself Interview Question

How to Answer the Do You Have Any Questions for Me Interview Question

Had a Great Interview But Have Got No Response to My Thank-You Emails

What Does It Mean if I Haven't Heard Anything Back from an Application/Interview in a Couple Weeks?

What to Wear to a Lunch Interview?

How to Effectively Interview Lateral Candidates: Pointers for Law Firms

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

The Secret to Effectively Sharing Concerns about Your Current Employer without Committing the Most Common Interview Blunder

How to Conduct Yourself During a Lunch Interview