

# Off-the-Record Interview Tips from Law Firm Interviewers

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

## INTERVIEW TIPS FROM THE INTERVIEWERS - FOR LATERAL ATTORNEYS

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

We have entered the busiest time of year for hiring a lateral attorney. [Recruiters at law firms are concentrating more on hiring laterals](#) for busy and growing practice groups and less on on-campus interviews. In addition, [more lateral attorneys begin their job searches after annual reviews](#), bonus distributions, and promotion decisions. To help you prepare for lateral associate interviews, we thought we would share some of the best preparation activities and strategies we have found. Several studies have concluded that more interview preparation increases the chance of success in the law firm interview process.

In contrast to summer associate interviews, lateral hiring interviews are more substantive. You should be prepared to demonstrate what you have learned during your time at the firm. Your legal experience and the basic information about the group and the firm you are interviewing need to be committed to memory. You have the opportunity to tell the interviewer your professional story, not just a series of facts and answers. You should go in with an agenda: to tell the story you want to tell. At the same time, the interviewer may control the format, your message matters.

Recruiters can give you a real edge over other candidates when it comes to preparing for interviews. You should work with a legal recruiter from a recruiting firm, like BCG Attorney Search, throughout the lateral process. A recruiter should help you figure out how to best articulate your story, anticipate the interviewers' questions, and be prepared for any curveballs the interviewers may throw.

### PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

**What is the first rule of job interview preparation? You can never prepare too much...**

Most of us admit we have left job interviews feeling as if our preparation was not up to snuff. And with so many things to remember before the big day, it is no wonder people can feel overwhelmed. Always prepare a pre-interview checklist to take some of the work off your shoulders.

"The most impressive interviewers are those who can clearly articulate why they are interested in our firm, with specific reasons 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 interview 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 want them on my team!"

"Do not discount the [importance of legal writing samples](#). Those that review your [legal writing](#) take it seriously. Ensure you provide your best possible work and [triple-check for typos and Bluebooking](#)."

"[Make sure your writing sample for a legal position](#) does not contain confidential or privileged information. Also, [do not unnecessarily redact information](#) that is not confidential or privileged, as this shows you do not 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

We have been told since law school that the first impression is the last impression. Law firm interviews can be nerve-wracking for many, and initial excitement can quickly turn into apprehension. You may be nervous before an interview, but there are a few things you can do to ensure you leave a lasting impression!

A successful interview requires preparation and planning, and the following tips can help you stand out from the crowd!

"One of the most important interview tips you will ever get: Being late is the kiss of death. [Assume the interview is going to begin 30 minutes before the actual time](#). Grab a cup of coffee if you arrive early."

"Be polite and courteous to the support staff such as secretaries, front desk receptionists, 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 the cell phone off. Get a haircut. For men, wear a dark suit, a white/blue shirt, and a red/blue tie. Take off that strange-looking high school ring. No one will appreciate your unique fashion sense. Do not give people something weird to remember you by two months later when they are trying to remember who you are and whether you deserve an offer."

"Do not look at your watch during an interview, and turn your 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 is nothing worse than clammy hands."

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

## THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

Partners in law firms ask questions to gauge your knowledge of the specific field, understand how you balance your caseload, and how you interact with clients. Knowing what questions to expect will help you prepare for your interview. You can make a lasting impression on partners by delivering detailed answers, increasing your chances of getting a job offer.

"Start a conversation with your interviewer before they have a chance to ask a question: Remember to keep it conversational. It is not an interrogation or deposition."

"If you are an associate, focus on impressing the partners but also focus on bonding with the other associates as friends. I do not 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 your demonstrated interest in living there. For example, how many times have you visited, lived there, etc."

"It is much better to preemptively 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 (your interviewer) is about themselves--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 every detail of your job description 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 job interview with somebody that is not doing the job well."

"The more we laugh 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 show the firm in a negative light. You can ask questions about things that you're 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 do not know the answer to a question, just say, 'I do not 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 cannot 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 speaking with you outside the office."

"Do not 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 are gone and scrutinized for inconsistencies."

"If an interviewer initiates a debate on a legal issue, do not 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 needs help because they cannot handle their workload."

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

See [Interviewing Tips](#) for more information.

## POST-INTERVIEW

Experienced attorneys with whom you have interviewed vary in their opinions on whether you should send a thank-you note. Thank you emails are not expected to be sent in some parts (e.g., the Northeast). They are more common in other regions (such as the Southeast). Please make sure it is perfect if you decide to send one. It will be viewed as a sample of your writing.

As such, you may choose to send a short follow-up email to individuals with whom you met if: (1) you were very interested in the potential employers and would like to reiterate that interest; (2) you thought you connected with the interviewer and would like to remind the interviewer of your similar interests; or (3) the interviewer went out of their way for you (e.g., treated you to a nice dinner or reception). If you decide to write a follow-up email, you should do so as soon as possible.

"In regards to [post-interview etiquette](#), I recommend that candidates not repeatedly call when someone is not answering. We have caller ID, and it is 'stalker-ish' to see a person call ten times in a row."

"Do not 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 do not write the same thing to each person."

"In a thank-you note, do not say you think you are a 'perfect fit' after an initial interview. It is too early, and questions your sincerity."

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

## Conclusion

The purpose of law internships is to expose law students to the legal profession. Students learn about the complexities of the legal profession. Nevertheless, the interview process also becomes more difficult as you gain more experience.

Your chances of getting a job offer increase if you make a great impression and demonstrate your best qualities during an interview. You can impress the hiring team and make them remember you by preparing for the interview and following certain steps afterward.

Examine tips on how to handle interviews that differ from one-on-one meetings. The list includes tips for phone interviews, second interviews, lunch and dinner interviews, behavioral interviews, interviewing in public, and more advice for interview success.

