

# *The Changing Interview Landscape*

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While there is a general degree of consistency in the entry-level hiring process for law firms, which you likely experienced during the annual on-campus interview process at your law school, the interview process for lateral hires has continued to change over the past two decades, and has generally become less standard as time goes by due to firms experimenting with a variety of interview procedures, evaluations, and techniques designed (presumably) to ensure the best hiring and retention processes to build their business.

Historically, the hiring process followed the same basic steps:

- Firms would receive resumes for a particular position.
- Candidates would be selected for interviews.
- [The selected candidates would interview in person with the hiring partner and other relevant attorneys.](#)
- The partners would convene to make a decision on extending an offer to their top candidate.
- The candidate would accept the offer.
- [The firm would perform a conflicts screen and reference check.](#)
- The firm and candidate agree on a start date, and the candidate joins the firm as a lateral attorney.

While the hiring process generally follows roughly the same outline these days, [it is the third step that is the focus of this article, namely the shifting and expanding nature of the interviews themselves.](#)

First of all, it is rare these days for a firm to extend an offer to a candidate after a single round of interviews. It does happen (in fact, I had a candidate receive and accept an offer last week after a single round of interviews with a full litigation team, including the firm's name partner), but it is much more typical for the interview stage to include:

An initial screening interview, usually with the hiring partner or head of the practice group for which the candidate is interviewing. If a candidate is located outside of the city where they are applying, it is increasingly common that this initial interview will be conducted over the phone or via a videoconference technology such as Skype. If a firm has an office in the city where the candidate is located, it is quite common for the firm to invite the candidate to that office and arrange a videoconference interview using the firm's internal video network.

One or more follow-up interviews. If the candidate passes the initial screening interview, there will be at least one round, and frequently multiple rounds, of follow-up. This can either be with additional attorneys at the office for which the candidate is interviewing, and/or with other attorneys in the candidate's practice group from other offices. As just one example, one of my intellectual property candidates underwent a series of videoconference interviews with the IP partners in three of the firm's offices aside from the one for which she was applying because the group often cross-collaborated on their patent matters among their various offices. Sometimes a personality and/or skills test. This is still not entirely common, but we are seeing it more and more, and it is good to be aware that this may be a part of your interview process depending on the firm. One real estate candidate interviewing with one of the most prominent Pacific Northwest firms was given an exercise to complete after her initial two rounds of interviews that involved demonstrating her ability to modify an existing lease according to a "client's" emailed request. A litigation candidate for a well-regarded Sacramento firm was administered a "personality and values" questionnaire during his initial visit with the firm, and the firm's marketing coordinator and one of the partners questioned him at length on his follow-up visit based on his answers/results.

The rise of the more lengthy and involved interview process, as well as the increasingly frequent use of

additional "tests" for skills and personality, reflect the caution with which firms are approaching their hiring, staffing, and budgeting these days. In the wake of the recession, and in light of the increasing focus on the bottom line for equity partners, firms want to ensure that they are balancing the ability to meet client demands with the necessity of maintaining a sustainable practice in terms of salary and overhead. Bringing on a lateral attorney represents a significant investment in terms of time, money, and effort, and firms who want to staff their practice groups at appropriate levels and limit attorney turnover are using every tool at their disposal to ensure they are making the right choice with every new hire.

See [Top Ten Interview Questions](#) for more information

If you have not interviewed or engaged in a lateral job search in awhile, the legal market landscape may seem somewhat unfamiliar, especially if you only have experience with face-to-face interviews and a short hiring process. I had one recent candidate who took a firm's request for an initial phone screen as an insult and wanted to decline the interview, because he assumed that they would have flown him out for an initial interview if they were "serious" about his candidacy, but that was simply not the case - rather, it had been many years since this candidate had been on the market, and he was not familiar with the fact that 1) a phone screen is a standard part of the process when a candidate is not in the same city for which they are interviewing, and 2) being selected for a phone screen definitely means a firm is serious, as they have chosen your resume out of a stack of presumably hundreds for a busy partner to take the time to speak with you.

See [Interviewing Tips](#) for more information

The lateral hiring process will continue to change as we move forward, and I predict we will only see an increase in the use of additional evaluation tools and metrics as firms look to continue refining their business models to maximize profits and minimize turnover through efficient and effective staffing. Hopefully this article has given you a sense of what you might expect as you embark on your job search in the current market, and as things continue to change, a good legal recruiter should be able to provide you with solid advice and guidance through the shifting legal hiring landscape.

Learn why attorneys usually fail law firm phone-screening interviews in this article:

[Why Most Attorneys Fail Telephone-Screening Interviews](#)

See the following articles for more information:

[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](#)

*Interested in Learning More About Legal Hiring? Read the Definitive Guide:*

[How to Hire a Legal Recruiter for Your Law Firm: How Law Firms Recruit Attorneys Using Legal Recruiters](#)

