

The #1 Thing Attorneys and Law Students Need to Say in Law Firm Interviews to Get Hired

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In the law profession, any weakness is portrayed as a fatal flaw.

This is why it is imperative that attorneys who are interviewing need to project strength.

During the interviewing process an attorney needs to become an advocate and represent themselves as competent, strong and mistake free.

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I have been "packaging" attorneys and selling them to law firms and legal employers the majority of my career. I have some secrets. If an attorney really understands these secrets, they can be enormously effective in interviews, in cover letters and more.

The secret I am about to share with you is so powerful, I am not even sure I should be sharing it. It works so well. But, regardless of who you are, I want you to do well.

If you understand this secret--truly understand it--[you can be absolutely triumphant in your interviews](#). Legal employers will want to hire you. This secret seems to work on a subconscious level on attorneys making them want to bring you in the door to start working immediately.

A. A Little Bit About the Psychology of Attorneys and the Legal Profession

Attorneys are programmed to look for weakness in arguments and other people. This is just how they operate. [They are good at spotting weaknesses in others and emerging the victors in arguments](#). They expect other attorneys to always aggressively fight for their side of a matter as well. [Attorneys would not have jobs if everyone just surrendered when confronted](#) with their arguments. Argument and taking sides is a "sport" for attorneys.

I've been involved in cases where someone from the other side stole millions of dollars from someone else and admitted it. Despite this, the attorney for the person who stole all of the money argued aggressively for the thief and did what they could to get the person out of trouble. They will use every argument they can regardless of the guilt of the person. Attorneys do this for murderers, rapist and other offenders. It is their role in society and what they are paid and expected to do.

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

Attorneys are paid to protect their clients' interests and portray these clients in the strongest possible light.

Thus:

If an attorney does a bad job for their client, they are not respected by other attorneys.

If an attorney talks poorly about a client when the client is not there, they are not respected by other attorneys.

If an attorney does not do everything they can to take a client's side, they are not respected by other attorneys.

If an attorney does not make the best possible argument they can for a client, they are not respected by other attorneys.

Attorneys often hide weakness (as long as it advances their interests) and portray strength. This is fundamental to the profession and is almost "genetic" in the nature of attorneys. This deep-seated requirement is something attorneys expect from each other.

Because attorneys want weakness hidden and strength projected, the most important thing that any attorney can do [when interviewing for a job](#) is to become an "advocate" and "represent" themselves. This means that the attorney needs to portray themselves as being competent, strong, and as if mistakes are not made by them.

To portray yourself as "in the right", it is often necessary to potentially admit one weakness to overcome a greater one and get sympathy from an employer, but this needs to be done in a creative way. For example, an attorney in a courtroom television drama may say:

"My client is not a nice guy. Hate him for being a bad guy. But that does not mean he committed this murder. Hate him, but do not convict him of murder."

[In a similar vein, an attorney who is interviewing with a law firm might say:](#)

"I realize that I did not go to the most prestigious law school. However, because of this, I also believe I need to work harder and will live, breathe, eat and sleep this job. I really want this job."

That sort of statement shows the attorney is interested in improving despite a weakness. This statement is also what I call "an S-curve modifier." (More on this below.)

B. About the S-curve and S-curve Modifiers (I Promise this Will Not Turn Into a Drawn Out Economics Lesson)

The S-curve is a feature that is typically used to describe businesses and illustrates the following:

- (1) A business typically grows for a length of time until it tapers or levels off.**
- (2) Then it begins to go down as it encounters resistance.**
- (3) The resistance is typically the entrance of competitors, lower prices, or the simple fact that the**

majority of the market has already purchased the product.

(4) The business then (usually) goes away, becomes a much lesser version of its former self (usually), or figures out how to start growing again.

Here is a very simple S-curve representing steps (1) through (3):

This generally happens to all businesses--unless they innovate, come up with new products, or figure out how to get new revenue out of existing products by tapping new markets.

If a business is able to overcome the S-curve then the chart starts to look like this:

A new S-curve demonstrates that the company will be able to continue growing and generating revenue by overcoming the resistance that it is facing.

Incidentally, [the S-curve is something that defines not just businesses, but our careers and lives](#). Unless we die an untimely death, most of us are born, grow up, get old and die. There is no way around this. It is the same way with careers. Most people start off their careers on the "ground floor", they get a few promotions and--at some point--the growth stops, and their careers decline (and then end).

For many attorneys, the decline starts when they are three months into their [first legal job with a large law firm](#), and they clearly demonstrate they do not have what it takes.

Other attorneys may "flunk out" during their [summer associate job](#) and not get an offer and have other problems.

[Still other attorneys may last until their seventh or eighth year, at which point they take a much less demanding job](#).

Other attorneys may make partner then start tapering off around the age of 50 or so.

Other attorneys may continue growing until their 60s or even 70s.

The best attorneys, of course, are generally the ones who are able to continue growing, improving and avoiding the downward slope of the S-curve.

C. How the S-curve is Relevant to Switching Jobs in the Legal Profession

In business, it is nearly impossible for a company to raise money from investors or go public if it is on an S-curve that is going downward. In fact, to simply raise money from private investors, most companies need to show revenue increases of at least 10% annually. To go public, this revenue increase should be at least 30% annually! Because most S-curves end up going downward, investors will not put money into these companies.

No one wants to invest in a company on the way down regardless of the reasons. In the business world, people only want to invest in companies on the way up. It is the same thing with attorneys [hiring attorneys](#). No employer wants to invest in an attorney on the way down. The biggest and best investment for an employer is always going to be an attorney on the way up. The most important thing you can ever understand about [getting a legal job](#) is that you must portray yourself as someone who is on the way up.

Because the concept of [avoiding the perception of weakness](#) is so deeply ingrained into the legal profession, and because employers want to hire someone on the way up, an attorney who is interviewing and [looking for a new job](#) should always portray themselves as being someone who is working very hard to stay ahead

of the decline of the S-curve. This is the best possible move you can make.

No one wants to hire someone on the way down. Do you want to know something? If someone has been at four or five law firms in ten years, each of a lesser prestige level than the last, the odds are very good that they are going to leave the sixth firm for an even less prestigious one. If someone is on their way down the totem pole and reaches out to an employer, the employer will avoid this person like the plague. [Legal employers are really only interested in hiring people who are winning and part of the upward curve.](#)

Someone on the way up is inspiring and means the legal employer is investing in something that has more value tomorrow than they have today. Someone who is losing is bad luck.

No one wants to hire an attorney who appears to be losing. If an attorney complains of not having enough work, not getting along with peers, issues with authority, mistakes, or other conflicts, they look like a loser to the firm interviewing them. This is not what people want to hear. People want to hire people who are on their way up, achieving great things and who will bring that historical pattern of achievement to their next job as well. Business (all business) is about winning. Virtually every employer out there wants to hire people on the way up.

No one wants to hire an attorney who has given up. I have spoken with countless attorneys throughout the years who are clear that, "I just want a job. I do not care what it is." These attorneys appear to have given up. They may be "shaken" by the economy, financial conditions, or other circumstances. Regardless of the reasons, it is never advisable to appear to be someone who has given up. You need to portray the same confidence a great attorney would defending a guilty criminal in an impassioned closing argument before a jury. That is your job.

Thus, when you are in [interviews with employers](#), it is crucial you portray yourself as being on the way up--and not on the way down on the S-curve.

History has taught generations of bankers, employers and businesses that it is never wise to invest in a business or person on the way down.

D. How to Avoid (1) Being on the Downward Part of an S-curve or (2) Seen as Being on the Downward Part of the S-curve

In the business world, if a company sees its overall revenues potentially decreasing, it has a few options:

Change how it is packaged. Companies will change the design of a product, bundle products together, change the quantity (offer more product for the same price), and other tools.

Change how it is priced. Lowering prices will make the product or service more affordable to more people. Increasing the price will make profits higher and the product more exclusive.

Find new customers. Companies will review their customer acquisition strategies and do their best to get as many new customers as possible.

Move to other areas. Companies in search of more revenue will open branches in other areas of the country or the world.

If you believe you are potentially facing a downward trajectory of an S-curve, the following are some useful ideas that can assist you in being seen as on an upward trajectory to new employers:

Package Yourself Differently. This is something the [best legal recruiters](#) understand how to do. Essentially, [when you are moving firms or jobs](#), you need to package yourself as someone who is on the way up and needs a different environment to capture new opportunities. An attorney working with small clients at a small law firm may tell interviewers of a larger law firm that they want to work with larger clients.

An attorney at a firm in a small city may tell an employer in a larger city they want to live somewhere that offers better cultural experiences.

Someone working with attorneys with good but not exceptional qualifications may tell an employer they want to work with better attorneys.

Someone in a branch office can tell an employer they want to work in a main office because they are

ambitious and dream of being part of firm management.

A partner with clients who works at a litigation-only law firm may tell a new firm they want to [work at a full-service law firm](#) so that they can start bringing in corporate, patent and other work.

A partner at a law firm with one office may tell a [new firm](#) they want to work at a firm with offices throughout the country so they can farm out work all over.

The idea is that you are improving, trying to get better, growing and trying to get ahead of the S-curve.

[Everything you say in your interviews needs to show that you are ahead of that decline.](#) The longest job searches and most difficult job searches occur when attorneys do not understand this.

Change How You Are Priced. It may sound simple (and it is) but if you are interviewing with an employer that pays substantially more than you are currently making, the employer is not going to see you as on your way down at all. Since our culture is so focused on money (and many attorneys are too!), if you interview with a better firm, you do not need to be worried about the perception that you are on the downward sloping portion of the S-Curve.

Associates interviewing for jobs with higher paying employers are almost always perceived as being on their way up.

[Partners who interview with other law firms with compensation systems that do not adequately reward business generation abilities will almost always be met with open arms--even if the firm is less prestigious--because they are "on their way up" \(financially at least\).](#)

Find New Types of Employers to Sell Your Talent to. [You can sell your services not just to law firms but to the government, in-house, to law schools, to public interest employers and more.](#) I've seen attorneys making \$250,000 a year take a job for \$30,000 a year from a public interest organization--and these were competitive jobs and no one certainly thought the person was on their way down. One way to keep moving up is to seek a new employer where you will have the opportunity to step off your current S-curve and begin a new one--not as an associate or partner, but as an [in-house counsel](#), [law professor](#), or something else.

A good way to keep your career on track is often to go to a new type of employer. This is an excellent strategy that can put you on a new path to achievement and marketability.

Move to a New Location. As a legal recruiter, some of the easiest placements for me to make occur when an [attorney is moving to another state or geographic location](#). Generally, when an attorney is moving to a new location, they can justify the move by explaining: (1) they are moving to be closer to their family, or (2) [they want to be in a bigger city with more opportunities](#). Each of these explanations are great because they portray strength--everyone respects someone who wants to be closer to their family and employers in big cities respect people trying to relocate there.

If you are from Ohio and working in New York, a smaller law firm in Ohio will think your decision to return is perfectly normal and part of an upward S-curve career and life trajectory--settling down with one employer, starting a family, wanting to be a big fish in a small pond and so forth. If you are in a position where you suspect you might be entering a declining S-curve, moving to a different city is a great idea.

E. Conclusions

The S-curve is something that every person should take into account when choosing:

Where they work

How hard they work

When they move

When they stay

When they begin [looking for a new job](#)

What they say in interviews

When they change careers

You need to position yourself in such a way that you do not appear to be on the declining part of the S-curve.

You need to [continually find new ways of doing things](#) that set you on a growth path. Your ability to (1) be perceived and (2) communicate to employers that you are on the upward part of the S-curve is crucial for your success.

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

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[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?](#)
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