

Dealing with Rejection

The job market can be a disappointing place to be. After spending three years in law school, earning top grades and great credentials, and landing at least one excellent position, we start to think of ourselves as pretty hot commodities. Even if we are unhappy in our current workplace, we have faith that the market will see us for what we are worth. We tend to think that every firm should want us, regardless of what we know about them. So, what happens when we get rejected after what we thought was a great job interview a law firm that we thought was the perfect fit? Well, we take it personally.

The [job search process](#) is far more personal than many of us realize. We don't think about how much our self-worth is tied to our identity as attorneys, and how much a rejection can make us feel worth less. If you are like most of us, you know what you're worth. You are pleased when people ask you what you do, where you work, and what [type of law you practice](#). And when you don't take the time to realize that you're proud of who you are professionally, a rejection from a law firm you interviewed with can be especially devastating.

Let's take a step back and think about what may have happened, and what to do next.

1. Understand that the firm has more information than you have.

Very often, both associates and partners will tell me that XYZ firm is "the perfect fit" for them. This is usually based on nothing more than the actual job posting, which I sent them. After candidates get an interview, they may do research on the firm, but information is usually pretty limited. A firm may have a reputation as a great place to work; that is easy enough to ascertain. But whether the work that the firm needs done coincides with your skill set and interests is not something you can necessarily know. The firm certainly knows what it needs; but they won't necessarily share it with you. This is by design. They don't want candidates to alter their presentation of themselves for the firm's benefit, so firms do not always advertise for exactly what they need. Instead, they advertise for general skills, and have you honestly tell them what you can do, without knowing what they truly need, and if your skills line up with what they need, they will hire you. You are in the unfortunate position of flying blind. A good recruiter will know general information about the firm's practice, but only the firm's partners know the details of the particular need at that moment. You are not in a position to determine whether the firm is perfect for you, because you do not really know [what the firm is looking for](#). Therefore, when a firm interviews and rejects you, remind yourself that there is probably more going on than you realize; and that they are simply looking for some skill that you don't happen to have, or don't have enough of.

2. Understand that you don't know what other factors came into play in the firm's decision.

Many times, attorneys have returned hopeful and exhilarated after a fantastic interview, only to be rejected without explanation. This can be devastating for the attorney. Keep in mind that any of the following factors, which have nothing to do with you, could have arisen, leading the firm to reject you. For example, the firm may have learned that a partner or group is leaving, and taking business. This changes the firm's fiscal landscape significantly, and also alters the sources of the firm's work, leading them to decide to wait before hiring, or not to hire at all. However, firms learn of these changes before they disclose them to the



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public, and that includes you (and me, your recruiter). This is one example of why a firm may reject you without providing a reason; although there is a reason, the firm is not a position to share it. A similar example would be when the firm either loses a client or fears that it may lose a client. Even if it isn't a client that you might work with, any change that affects the firm's bottom line may keep that firm from bringing on another attorney. Or, the firm might have entered into merger discussions, which may limit its ability to bring anyone else on. All of these situations will not be made public, so you will probably never know what really happened.

3.Â Â Â Move on, and prepare for more great interviews.

No matter what the real reason for your mysterious [rejection from a firm](#) you were excited about joining, you need to not take it personally, and you need to move on. You are just as valuable as you were before, and a rejection likely has nothing to do with you being great at what you do. Instead, either there simply wasn't a match between your skill set and the firm's needs, or something internal happened in the firm that you are not privy to. Take the opportunity to use the interview as practice. Think about answers that you could have given more effectively, and practice giving them out loud. Talk to your recruiter about any interview concerns. But most of all, stay positive, and remember what you're worth going into each interview. If you keep at it and remember that you are a valuable addition to the right firm, an excellent match will come up and you will be prepared.