

The Best Way for Attorneys to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

There are many people out there who go to work in jobs and for whatever reason are not challenged. Most often the people who claim they are not challenged are the same people who go out of the way to not challenge themselves.

Several years ago when looking for a position in Los Angeles I interviewed with numerous law firms. In virtually every one of these interviews I ran across an attorney who knew not one, not two, not three---but numerous, numerous attorneys in my current firm. If this is the case in a market the size of Los Angeles (and the market in Los Angeles is huge), I cannot even imagine what it must be like in smaller markets. For example, I am from Detroit. I grew up in a suburb of Detroit. When it came time for me to decide where to work in law school, when I started interviewing with firms in Detroit I knew many of the attorneys before I even arrived at the interviews--they were the parents of people I grew up with.

The following are my suggestions for the best way to prepare for a job search and interviews:

1. Know you are always being watched, observed and judged

When I was in high school I remember that one of the best looking girls in my school was known to be a prude and someone who would date boys but never let anything all that exciting happen. She was also a star athlete and a student counsel leader and a very respected student. My parents were divorced and lived about an hour apart. I lived with my father. The funny thing is that this same girl also had parents who were divorced and spent a lot of time in one city visiting a parent. The funny thing about this girl was she had the exact opposite reputation in the city where she did not live full time. Her strategy it seemed, like the strategy of many, was to have two separate personas. She knew that if she behaved one way in her school and around people there she would experience fall out. She also knew that by keeping her "wild side" in another town this would not affect her directly in her own back yard.

See also:

- [Top Ten Interview Questions](#)
- [How to Answer the "Tell Me about Yourself" Interview Question](#)

In life we are always being observed. We are being observed in our communities. We are being observed in our jobs. We are being observed by our peers. We are being observed by our superiors. There are a lot of people out there who understand that. The smart woman discussed above certainly understood that (albeit, in a different context).

When I went to look for a job in Detroit, despite the fact that I had not spent time in the city since high school, I already knew which firms I would likely get jobs in and which ones I likely would not. This had nothing to do with the prestige of the firm-it had to do with the people inside the firms. I knew that I had been close to certain people growing up and their parents like me. I also knew that I had not been close with others and had made some enemies along the way. Sure enough, when I started applying for jobs in Detroit I was preceded by my past. The Detroit legal community is small enough that most people know one another.

In everything you do in the public arena you are likely being observed, watched and judged. The people you need today will likely have some impact over events that may happen to you tomorrow. It is as simple as that. Like the woman discussed above, you need to do everything you can to maintain a strong public face at all

costs.

One thing about interviewing in law firms is that there will likely almost always be someone there you have known from a time before. That person will likely have a say in what is happening to you in your new position. **Be aware of this and you will be preparing for interviews every second of every day.**

2.Remember that the best lawyers can spot other good lawyers and you cannot "fake it"-you are always preparing for interviews just by doing a good job with your current work

There are many people out there who go to work in jobs and for whatever reason are not challenged. Most often the people who claim they are not challenged are the same people who go out of the way to not challenge themselves. We all know the type of person who does not challenge themselves in the job. These are the sorts of people always looking for shortcuts and other methods to do as little work as possible. I have never understood this sort of person-but they are there. This sort of person is also the same one who is likely to be very defensive when asked about something they do not know but think they should know-"oh, I already know that!" they will say.

When you are good at something and really doing your job you have the tendency to get "immersed" in your subject matter. Over time the subject matter and its intricacies and innuendos becomes almost second nature to the good student. You also become more astute and a level or presumed understanding emerges between people who understand the subject matter well. Little tidbits and other bits of understanding emerge. Two people who are very good at something share a similar understanding.

When you are interviewing with a truly excellent lawyer, they will also be able to tell if you share this level of understanding. If you are a slacker and not a hard worker, or someone who does not consistently challenge their mind, they will see right through this. This level of understanding is particularly important at the higher levels. You need to always be working hard and doing good legal work even when you may not want to make long-term plans to be at your current firm. This is essential.

3.You need to go into your job with a sincere and 100% desire to make it work and switch jobs infrequently-if at all

Until the 1980s, the majority of workers in America and in law firms rarely changed jobs-if at all. One of the major changes that happened was when the Japanese started importing cheaper and better cars into the United States. American car makers (a major industry at the time) could no longer afford to be as loyal to their employees and mass firings and layoffs became increasingly commonplace. Furthermore, pensions were fairly rapidly phased out at most companies in favor of 401ks-because employees began to be more "portable" in their jobs. Much of the changes that were occurring in corporate America soon found themselves into law firms and other [legal hiring](#) organizations.

Despite that fact that attorneys can switch jobs at a whim in the current economic climate, switch jobs is not always the smartest thing to do. Young lawyers (especially) like to feel as if they are in control and more valued by their employers than they value them. In addition, young attorneys are likely to move for a slight bump in salary, an attorney in the firm they do not like, or some other trivial sort of factor.

These are not good reasons to move. In fact, there are few good reasons to leave most legal employers. The best reason and the only reason is if there is something inside your current firm that is so endemic to the firm and so pervasive that unless you leave your career will never go forward. These factors also should be near 100% beyond your control. When you join an employer it is much like getting married. If you show a lot of commitment to your current employer you will be respected if you have to leave due to factors outside of your control.

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

The reason all of this is important is because the person interviewing you wants to trust you. If the person or organization interviewing you does not trust you and believes you may leave for a trivial reason then they are unlikely to hire you. If your reason for leaving is sound and the next firm who hires you believes you are likely to remain on board in the face of adversity then they are more likely to hire you. People want to have people with staying power in their organizations. No organization is perfect and all organizations go through ups and downs.

Conclusions

In everything you do-both inside and outside of work-you are always [preparing for your job search and interviews](#). You need to remember that the time to prepare for interviews and a job search is before you ever know you will need to prepare. Being a good attorney and a job searcher is something that takes the same amount of time and effort to achieve.

End your job search [here](#)!

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