45 of the Worst Possible Questions Attorneys and Law Students Can Ask in Interviews

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When any legal employer is interviewing you, he or she most often wants to hire you. The interviewer is hoping you are the best applicant for the job because interviewing people takes time that could be used to bill hours.

Any legal employer interviewing you essentially has three vital questions: (1) can you do the job? (2) can you be managed? and (3) will you do the job long term?

The interviewers are also asking a fourth question: do we like you? Every question you ask during a law firm interview should be evaluated through these four questions and whether they beget positive answers. Getting even one of these wrong can be fatal.

See also:
The Only Three Questions Law Firms Evaluate Applicants By

Attorneys and law students will often ask the wrong questions and disqualify themselves. Often, they may not even realize they asked the wrong questions, and they will be disqualified from the job without knowing it. Your objective when going into any interview is to get the job. While you may have many of the following questions for an employer, it is best to get the job first before asking any of them. When you ask these questions early on, it sends the wrong signal to the employer and causes them to doubt you.

The problem that people run into when interviewing is that they do not put themselves in their potential employer's shoes. Instead of realizing that employers have multiple options regarding people they could hire for the same job, many interviewees believe they are interviewing the employer. When they ask questions that turn off the employer, this creates many issues.

I. Questions that Show You Cannot Do the Job

Being able to do the job means that you have the ability, skills, and talent to do the work. Employers want to make sure there have not been past problems with your performance and that there are unlikely to be future ones. This means you will be in the office when needed, are capable of getting assignments done on time, and have good legal skills. Any question you ask that shows the opposite will often quickly disqualify you. Your objective should be not to ask any question that shows you might be incapable of doing the job.

Questions about working from home.

Bad questions include:
"How important is face time?"
"Are attorneys allowed to work at home if they get their assignments done?"

This is a big issue, which is why I put it first. Doing the job for most employers means being in the office to answer questions, discuss assignments in face-to-face meetings and other responsibilities. If you are not in the office, you are not doing the job. Employers deal with work-from-home questions all the time, and they
make running a law firm difficult. Once you ask these sorts of questions, the employer assumes that half of you will be missing - your presence. Employers rent offices, have secretaries, receptionists, libraries, and other facilities and personnel for a reason.

See also:
Avoid the Lawyer Mentality
Why Attorneys Who Do Not Make the Attorneys Who Give Them Work Feel Important Can Destroy Their Legal Careers
How to Succeed in the Practice of Law
You Will Succeed in Your Job and Job Search When You Are Concerned with Giving and Not Taking
Are You Motivated by Power, Relationships, or Achievement?

It is not enough for most employers that you just do the work. They want your presence, and without that, you are not doing the job. People are disqualified for raising work-from-home questions all the time. It is an issue that you should never raise. Employers will bring it up if it is part of how they do business, but you should never ask about this if they do not.

Questions about hours.

Bad questions include:
"How many hours does the average associate bill?"
"Do most of the attorneys work weekends?"

No interviewee should ever ask about hours. If you ask about hours, then the interviewer will assume you are concerned about hours. A law firm makes money by billing a lot of hours, and if you ask about hours, they will assume you are not willing to do what it takes to get the work done. Most practice areas inside law firms require that you work very hard when a deal is closing, a motion is being filed, or when similar situations arise. When you ask questions about hours, the law firm will assume you are not willing to give it your all and will find someone it believes can.

Questions that indicate an eagerness to start (especially if you are currently employed).

Bad questions include:
"How soon could I start if offered a position? I'm trying to make a decision quickly."
"How quickly are you deciding on whom to hire?"

Many attorneys lose their jobs or are looking for a new position while they are still featured on their firm's website. This is so common that law firms are very alert to the possibility that an attorney they are interviewing might have been let go from his last job. Asking questions about starting dates can make the law firm wonder whether you might have lost your job.

See also:
Compensation for Partners Is Never an Easy Thing
Leave Sex, Politics, Religion, and Social Activism out of Your Job Search and Career If You Want to Work in a Large Law Firm
Do Not Be Controlled By Your Need to Feel Significant
The Most Important Characteristic Attorneys Need to Succeed and Why It Is Almost Impossible for Them to Keep It
When a law firm is interviewing you, they are often concerned that you may be losing your existing position (if you are currently employed). While there could be all sorts of reasons for a job loss beyond your control, anything that makes the law firm have reason to question the status of your current position and your performance is problematic. Employers want to feel a bit of a “chase” is involved and that they will be lucky to get you. If your questions make you appear too eager for the position, they will be concerned quite often and be likely to lose interest.

Questions about doing other types of work than you are being interviewed for.

Examples of these sorts of questions would be:
“Do your litigators have the opportunity to do work in corporate and other departments?”
“Do your corporate attorneys ever have the opportunity to work on IP matters?”

I was interviewing with law firms in 1999 when the dot-com boom was taking off. I was a litigator. People with corporate experience were going into companies and getting stock options and becoming overnight millionaires. There was so much news out there about this that I wanted to participate as well. I decided I wanted to get corporate experience at whatever law firm I went to. When I asked about doing this, law firms realized that it would not be smart to hire me because I could not do the job.

Most employers with openings need a certain type of attorney. If a law firm needs a litigator and is interviewing you to be a litigator, the last thing it wants to hear is that you might be interested in doing corporate work. Many attorneys go into interviews and ask questions about doing other types of work in addition to what they are being interviewed for. If the law firm is interviewing you to do one type of thing, then the odds are very good that indicating an interest in doing something else will cause the firm to lose interest in you.

This is a huge mistake people make all the time. If someone is asking about doing work other than that which they are being interviewed for, the employer knows that you cannot do the job you are being interviewed for because you are not committed.

Questions that show an unwillingness to do certain types of work.

An example of these sorts of questions would be:
“Do you use contract attorneys to do document reviews?”
“Do you use junior attorneys to do discovery-related work?”
“Would I be able to run my own deals?”
“Will I be able to take depositions and do trials?”

Many attorneys want immediate responsibility and have an interest in doing a certain type of work the law firm does not need them for. Some believe they should no longer have to do a certain type of work when they have reached a certain level of experience. I have worked with litigation partners in the largest law firms in the United States who have never done a trial, for example.

Most law firms expect people to pitch in and do whatever is required to get work done for clients, regardless of whether they want to do it. If you start asking questions that indicate you are not interested in doing certain types of work, this will turn employers off very quickly. Legal employers want people who will get stuff done and not complain about this. I’ve worked with countless attorneys who were angry that they were getting assignments and work they felt were beneath them. If you are unwilling to do the work you are given, you will not be a good hire.

Questions that show you might be nervous doing a certain type of work.
An example of these sorts of questions would be:
"Do I have to interact with clients?"
"Will I need to go to court?"

There are all sorts of work and assignments that attorneys may be nervous about doing. If you come across as having any sort of reservations about doing a certain type of work, the law firm will simply find someone who does not have those reservations.

Questions that show you have not read the firm's website or publicly available information about the firm.

Bad questions include:
"What are some of the more significant transactions you have worked on recently?"
"How many attorneys are in your patent prosecution practice area?"

Attorneys ask questions all the time that show they did not do their homework. If you are not prepared for an interview, it indicates you are not likely to take preparation too seriously on client matters either.

Travel questions.

Bad questions include:
"Will I be expected to travel?"
"How often do attorneys travel?"

Many attorneys have kids at home and cannot travel. Other attorneys simply do not like to travel. However, this is an important component of the job at many law firms. If you are not able to travel, you cannot do the job.

Questions about reviews.

Bad questions include:
"How often do you do performance reviews?"
"What is traditionally covered in performance reviews?"

When people ask these sorts of questions in interviews, the perception is that they may have concerns about reviews. If someone has potential concerns about performance reviews, the employer will assume the person may have had negative performance reviews in the past.

Questions that show you have not been listening.

If you ask questions about topics that have already been covered and answered, this will hurt you. The interviewer will assume you are not interested in the position or not focused.

Questions about references.

Bad questions include:
"Would you like to see references?"
"Do you check references?"

It is the employer's responsibility to ask about references. If you are bringing this up, you are taking control
over something the employer should have control over. Also, it will bring attention to the fact that you feel you
may need these for some reason (such as the interview is not going well).

See also:
The Winning Mindset
Why Your Attorney Mind Self Sabotages Your Life and Career
Why Do Attorneys in Large Law Firms Work So Hard and Bill So Many Hours?
Are You Unhappy as a Lawyer? You May Be Buying into the Wrong Narrative
Love Your Work and the People Who Give It to You

Questions about people to help you with aspects of your job you may not be good at.

An example of this sort of question is:
"Do you have people who can proofread my work?"

This sort of question shows that proofing your work may be an issue for you and that you might do sloppy
work.

Questions about pro bono and other activities unrelated to the firm making money.

Bad questions include:
"How much pro bono can attorneys here do?"
"If I go get an LLM, does the law firm reimburse for this?"

Law firms need people to do the work. If you ask questions that show you have an interest in doing things not
related to their legal work, they will not like it and assume you cannot do the job.

II. Questions that Show You Cannot Be Managed

Being managed means you will follow directions, respect the people giving you work, and do what is asked
of you. If you cannot be managed, most law firms will not be interested in hiring you. This is one of the main
reasons people do not get the positions they are applying for.

Law firms need people who are able to be managed. If one person resents being managed, he could
possibly make others resent being managed. To run the firm and get the work done, law firms do not want
people who are not following directions, creating issues in the firm, or upsetting others. Attorneys who cannot
be managed are problematic to most law firms, so they avoid them.

Questions that indicate you think you are better than the job you are applying for.

Bad questions include:
"How long will I have to do this sort of work until I get to work on larger matters?"
"How soon until I can get trial experience?"

Questions about the staff support you will receive and have access to.

Bad questions include:
"Will I have my own secretary?"
"How is the word processing department?"
Questions about negative things in the firm’s history or online reviews.

Examples of this include questions such as:
"I read that the firm got a bad review for diversity. What do you think about that?"
"How do you think the fact that several partners have left recently affects the firm’s future?"

If you focus on negative things in the firm, it shows that you may be difficult to manage. Some people do the work in every firm and keep their heads down while others get stirred up by any sort of trouble or bad news. People who are overly vulnerable to the opinions of others are difficult for firms to manage.

Questions about special accommodations for certain disabilities, religious needs, and so forth.

Bad questions include:
"Can I leave early on the Sabbath?"
"I have difficulty walking up stairs. If hired, can I have an office on the ground floor?"

While law firms are obligated to provide certain accommodations, bringing attention to things that could make it difficult for them to manage you -- and put you in control of your time and where you work -- can create issues.

Questions about your office.

Bad questions include:
"Will I have my own office?"
"Where would my office be located?"

While this may not seem like an issue indicating whether or not you can be managed, it is. People get upset about offices, and many attorneys create tension in their place of employment over their offices. If you bring this up, the law firm will think this is important to you, and they could avoid hiring you.

Questions about management.

Bad questions include:
"How is the firm managed?"
"How are decisions made in the firm?"

This should not be your concern when interviewing - and might not even be something you should worry
about years into working in a firm. People who worry about this sort of stuff often leave.

**Questions about the personal life of your interviewer.**

Bad questions include:
"What kind of stuff do you like to do in your free time?"
"Do you have any kids?"

**Questions about parking.**

Bad questions include:
"Does the firm pay for parking?"
"Where do associates park?"

This should be the least of your concerns while interviewing. If you are concerned with this, law firms will assume you could leave for trivial reasons.

**Questions about benefits.**

Bad questions include:
"What type of health insurance does the firm offer?"
"Does the firm have dental and vision?"
"Does the firm match 401(k) contributions?"

Your emphasis while interviewing should be on doing the work.

**Questions about client contact, going on pitches, and related issues.**

Bad questions include:
"Will I have to go on pitches?"
"Will I be able to go on pitches?"
"How much client contact can I expect?"

Many attorneys leave a firm because they do not get enough of this. You need to ask these questions after being hired.

**Questions about the stability of the employer.**

Bad questions include:
"How stable is this practice group?"
"I heard there were layoffs a few years ago. Is everything OK now?"

Most law firms go through ups and downs. If the law firm perceives you will leave when they are down, they will be less likely to hire you.

**Questions about the quality of support staff.**

Bad questions include:
"What is the quality of the support staff like?"
"Do you think the support staff is happy?"

Lawyers leave because of the quality of support staff all the time. If you bring this up, law firms may not like it.
Questions about controversial political, social, racial, religious or other topics.

The vast majority of attorneys in the United States do not appreciate the country’s history of poor treatment of women, various minorities, religious groups, and people of different sexual orientations. However, once you start bringing this stuff up during interviews, it can frighten law firms. Many law firms have been sued for some sort of discrimination-related issue in the past (or are currently being sued). Introduce this sort of stuff into a discussion and it can be taken the wrong way.

Allow law firms to broach the subject. As sensitive as this is, you should look for evidence of tolerance and other viewpoints during the interview and not ask too much about it - at least until you get an offer.

Questions about perks such as car services, people to run errands, and so forth.

These sorts of questions show the wrong focus. If the person who asks them does not get these kinds of perks, the interviewer will likely think this is someone who will get upset about perks and leave.

III. Questions that Show You Will Not do the Job Long Term

Early in my career running BCG Attorney Search, I hired two recruiters. One had been at her previous job for eight years, and the other had been at her last job 17 years. The one who had lasted eight years at her previous job stayed 10 years and the one who had worked 17 years at her previous job stayed 18 years.

In the interim, all sorts of people came and went who were good enough recruiters but simply did not want to be managed and constantly found issues to get upset about. Most people who had stayed in their previous job for two years would stay with me for one to three years. There are people out there who stay in jobs and those who do not. Law firms want you to stay. If they do not think you will do the job long term, they will not hire you.

Questions about raises, bonuses and other financial issues.

Bad questions include:
"How are bonuses calculated?"
"What sort of business development budget would I get?"

Most young associates, law students and other young professionals should be focused on getting experience. If they are concerned with money issues, the odds are always very good that they will leave as soon as they get an offer for more money. Law firms do not like this, and it shows you are a bad investment.

See also:
Why Your Success and Happiness as an Attorney is About Being Someone Who Builds the Firm and People there Up and is Not a Source of Negativity and Problems
To Boutique or Not to Boutique
A Career Guide for Law Firm Partners
Do and Give More Than Is Expected of You
The Reasons Most Attorneys with 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble (and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers)

Questions that indicate a need for immediate responsibility.
Bad questions include:
"How soon until I can take depositions?"
"Will I get to do my own deals?"

If someone is overly hungry for responsibility and does not get it, they will likely leave.

Questions about partnership potential.

Bad questions include:
"How soon until I am evaluated for partner?"
"How many associates make partner each year?"
"What is the fastest someone has been made partner?"
"Will I be able to be considered for partner after one year instead of two?"

Questions about maternity leave, paternity leave, vacations.

Bad questions include:
"How long are attorneys given for maternity leave?"
"How long are attorneys given for paternity leave?"

Questions about people no longer there who moved on to other firms.

Examples include:
"Where do most people go to work after working here?"

Questions that show low energy and enthusiasm for the job.

There are many questions attorneys ask that can show a lack of real enthusiasm for the job and employer. These are flat, nonsense questions that are just filler and have no real connection to the firm or interviewer. These sorts of questions make it obvious that you may not like the job or firm.

IV. Questions that Could Make People Not Like You.

Attorneys want to like the people they are working with. They are always wondering: Will this person be my friend or foe? Asking questions that make people not like you will disqualify you quickly.

Questions about other attorneys in the firm whom others may not like, including ones no longer there.

You need to be careful about those you ask about. If you ask about people no longer with the firm, they may have left under bad circumstances. Asking about these people can associate them with you and make you be seen negatively in the interviewer's eyes.

Questions about whose client someone might be.

Examples include:
"Is that your client?"

Partners will often talk about matters they are working on in interviews. If you ask them whether someone is their client, they may need to say it is someone else's, and not enjoy doing this. Service partners are sometimes resentful of this role, and if they think you will not treat them with respect because a client is not
theirs, they will not be as likely to hire you.

**Questions about other attorneys in the office who seem off.**

Examples include:
"*My last interviewer seemed interesting. Is he always like that?*"

There are attorneys in most offices who are off. If the interviewer thinks you are making fun of someone, he will assume you may do the same with him and decide he does not like you.

**Questions that show you come from a privileged background.**

Examples include:
"*Does anyone in the office play squash?*"
"*I see from that picture your daughter rides horses. I grew up riding dressage. Do you like it?*"
"*Did you enjoy your vacation to Aspen? My parents have a second house there.*"

Most lawyers did not grow up playing squash or have second homes in expensive places, and some resent those with such backgrounds. This can make an interviewer not like you.

**Questions about going out after work to bars and other establishments.**

Examples include:
"*Where do people go out after work?*"
"*Do people hang out a lot outside the office?*"

While it might not appear that there is anything wrong with these sorts of questions, the issue is that they can alienate some people because many others are not included in these sorts of events. If you ask the wrong person, he may feel that you will be someone who might exclude him as well.

**Questions about the interviewer's background (racial, sexual).**

Examples include:
"*I see you went to the University of Utah. Are you LDS?*"

Most people do not want to talk about this stuff in interviews. Bringing these sorts of things up can cause potential friction and is not worth it.

**Questions about where the interviewer lives.**

Asking these kinds of questions can make the interviewer self-conscious and feel bad. In some metropolitan areas, where you live carries all sorts of connotations about who you are religiously, ethnically, and even sexually. For example, in Los Angeles, West Hollywood is a very gay area. Fairfax is a very Jewish area. Beverly Hills is Persian. Stay away from these questions.

**Questions about whether or not the interviewer has kids.**

Most interviewers are uncomfortable talking about this sort of information with strangers in interviews. Avoid these questions.

**Questions about whether an interviewer was in a specific fraternity in college, on law review, knew someone in law school, and similar personal questions.**

These sorts of questions can alienate the interviewer because it might point out his own perceived
weaknesses/failings or remind him of someone he did not like or a group of people he did not like. It is best to be careful and avoid these sorts of questions entirely.

**Questions about when the interviewer graduated from college, law school.**

These sorts of questions are essentially asking the interviewer's age. They should be avoided.

**Questions about negative reviews of the law firm online.**

No one wants to have to justify something negative. It also associates you with the negative question.

**Questions about why the attorney left a prior firm.**

These sorts of questions could bring up negative feelings in the interviewer.

**Conclusions**

When interviewing with law firms, many people make giant mistakes by asking the wrong questions. For a list of good questions to ask in an interview, see here:

- 40 Questions Attorneys and Law Students Should Ask in Law Firm Interviews and Questions You Can Ask the Law Firm Interviewer as Well
- What Questions Should a Law Firm Associate or Law Student Ask in a Law Firm Interview?
- Top 26 Questions Law Firms Typically Ask Attorneys and Law Students in Interviews
- Top 10 Interview Questions During Your Law Firm Interview
- 100+ of the Toughest Interview Questions Law Firm Ask Attorneys and Law Students and How to Answer Them
- BCG Interview Tips