

# How Law Firms and Other Hiring Organizations Determine if a Candidate Wants the Job

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When I was around nine years old, my mother took me to a farm outside Detroit to pick out my first dog, a Brittany Spaniel puppy. I walked into the house to a room where all the puppies were, and one puppy came up to me and kept kissing me and following me around. The other puppies seemed much less interested in me. When I picked out the puppy, my mom asked me why I picked that puppy. I told her I chose it because it was the one that seemed to like me the most.

Years later, when I was in law school, I met my first wife. She had many suitors and people who seemed interested in her. Comparatively to some of them, I did not have as much to offer. Nevertheless, when we finally got married, she told me that the reason she picked me was that I was the one that seemed to want to be with her the most--and I did. Everyone else interested in her was not ready to fully commit and would leave when she pushed them away. I never went away.

A few years ago, I had an in-house counsel opening in my company. I had hundreds of applicants for the position and so many applicants that I did not look forward to reviewing resumes. The person that I ended up hiring was not a good hire and never should have been hired. However, she walked into my office without an interview and said she wanted the job. She told me she wanted to work for me, knew who I was, and believed in my company and me. This made me hire her.

When I was in high school, my [mentor](#) asked me about my first-choice school. When I answered, he said he would do whatever he could for me, and I ended up getting there. The same thing happened to me in law school. I had good reasons for going to each school, and it helped me rise above others from the many resumes received.

When I was in my third year at the [University of Virginia Law School](#), I walked by the admissions office. I saw a few people standing around and sitting outside of the admissions office. They looked nervous and were all dressed up. It seemed a little early for interviews, so I asked an admissions person what they were doing there. He told me they were on the waitlist for the school. Every year, people on the waitlist showed up in the lobby, notified the admissions office that they were there, and would wait until the admissions office made a final decision.

Most of the organizations and people I have become connected to in my life came to me because I wanted them. Hiring and bringing on people who want what you have is a wise business decision. They are likely to [be committed](#) because they have good reasons for applying.

There is a high proportion of attorneys who do not want to be at your firm, and they do not necessarily want the job you have to offer them. They are simply biding their time until something better comes along. Regrettably, they will never give up trying to find another position. The only people you should be hiring to work in your law firm are people who want the job and want it for the right reasons. It is pretty easy to find out if people do not want the job. This should be your most important priority when interviewing and evaluating attorneys.

When I was in college, I went to at least 30 or more on-campus interviews. Investment banks, consulting firms, and all sorts of other employers came onto campus to interview for entry-level jobs. I was probably the biggest walking disaster you could imagine of someone interviewing for a job. Although I eventually got hired

for a job, the group that hired me made a huge mistake, and I will tell you why in a moment.

I started an asphalt business in Detroit when I was around eighteen years old. When you do asphalt work in Michigan from the spring to the early fall, you can succeed. During the three months of summer, I could make enough to support myself year-round. By the time I was a senior in college, I had earned enough to support myself and became independent. I got to build a business with recurring revenue, drive around in trucks, have employees, and learn a lifetime skill. It afforded me the capability of living somewhere warm in the winters and not work. Why would I give up my independence to work at a bank or a consulting firm? Compared to a regular job working for someone else, I simply could not reconcile myself to that role.

I went into [interviews](#) and talked about myself and my asphalt business. The kids in my school were all dressed up for interviews, would spend hours preparing, and I could care less. I had [great grades](#) and a lot to offer. However, I interviewed for jobs that paid much less and took away all my independence, so I did not dress the part. I had more [confidence](#) than most of my interviewers because I knew I could take care of myself. I did not have a strong interest in who or what I was interviewing for. I liked the idea of working in a big bank in New York, but it did not mean much to me. Also, I was conflicted:

Why would I go to work in a big bank for a few years, making half the salary I could make if I went to a top law school? Most of the kids interviewing with these banks would never get a job with them anyway.

My school had already spoken with me about attending a Ph.D. program which included a stipend of \$15,000 a year and free tuition. That amount of money and free education ended up being much more than a bank would pay me, and I would get a Ph.D. in the process!

I had also applied and interviewed with [Harvard Business School](#) when I was in college (I eventually did not get in). Most of these kids were getting jobs in banks to gain experience for business school, and I was already in a position where I could bypass that. That seemed like a better option!

I was also waiting to find out if I got into a bunch of [law schools](#). That seemed like it could be a much better option as well.

Why would I give up that independence to put on a suit each day and work with a bunch of people in an office building? Why would I possibly want to work in [an entry-level position](#) with all of these options on the table?

Because I did not want the jobs I was interviewing for, I went into interviews [unprepared](#), unmotivated, and did all wrong things:

In one interview with a trading firm in Chicago, the interviewer asked me:

"Do you know where the NASDAQ and NYSE are at today?"

"In New York?"

"Not where they are located ... Do you have any idea of the range that they are both in?"

"No."

"Do you know the difference between the two?"

"No, but I could learn!"

This sort of banter characterized every single interview I had.

In other interviews, some only thirty minutes, people would ask me early in the interview about a book I wrote

regarding Detroit Race Relations. I would talk a full twenty-five minutes while their eyes glazed over. Despite the obvious body language that they were bored as hell, I would keep talking.

I went to a party and stayed out until 3:00 am before an 8:00 am callback interview with JP Morgan in downtown Chicago. I showed up in their office, probably smelling like beer, messy, and not looking like I was in a good way. I was so spaced out that I did not correct my first and subsequent interviewers when they said to me:

"Andrew Wong, it's nice to meet you. It's not every day we get to meet a Notre Dame basketball player!"

*What the hell are these people talking about?* I started wondering to myself. I was too out of it to correct them and just plain confused. My first name is Andrew (I go by my middle name "Harrison"), but my last name is not "Wong." In interview after interview, people kept bringing stuff up that made no sense.

"I see here you majored in economics," one interviewer said.

"No, it was an interdisciplinary major that had economics in it, but it was not pure economics," I responded.

"Then why does it say you are majoring in economics?" the interviewer asked.

"It should not. That is odd." With puzzled looks, these interviews continued.

I was about six interviewers in before I finally worked up enough courage to set the record straight when some question about my supposed [resume](#) came up that was just too far out there to ignore. I do not remember what it is, but I think it was something about needing to catch a plane to get to a game on Saturday.

You do not stay out until 3:00 am the night before an interview if you want a job. Your priority is getting the job and making sure you do. You want very much to get the position, and that is the primary concern. You learn everything you can about an employer before showing up to the interview and look and act your best. If you really want the job, these are your best options.

I never got a job with an employer on campus. Because of my grades, I was interviewed by the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., for what was essentially a two-year fellowship and ended up getting a job there. After they made me an offer and I accepted, I ended up contacting them and telling them I was going to law school instead. They should never have offered me the job. They flew me out to Washington, D.C., and spent only a few hours interviewing me and based everything on recommendations and grades. It was a big mistake ever offering me the job because I did not want it and stiffed them after being offered the job.

When an attorney does not want the job you are offering, they will almost always leave. Attorneys who waste your time training and getting them up to speed are terrible hiring decisions because they take away positions from people who want the job, undermine morale when they leave, are never fully committed to the job, are always looking for something else, and more. Here are some signs that someone does not want the position for which you are advertising and interviewing them.

### See also:

[Interview Preparation Techniques](#)

[Top 10 Interview Questions During Your Law Firm Interview](#)

[Your Life Is Controlled by Your Decisions and Your Commitment to Them](#)

**The Person's Resume Shows that they Are Interested in Something Else, or a Different Type of Employer than You.**

The resume of an attorney (or law student) who is not interested in working for you, or doing the sort of job you have, will most often have stuff on it that looks like they do not belong with you. The attorney's interest will be incompatible with the position that you have, what they have done in the past, or where it looks like they want to be going.

Here are some recent examples that come to mind.

**An attorney who worked in a prominent New York law firm as a litigator for three years is currently unemployed applying to major law firms and whose resume emphasizes their interest in pro bono.** He went to a top college and law school where he was interested in all sorts of social-justice-related organizations and so forth. His resume lists all of his [pro bono](#) activities under the "experience" section of his [law firm experience](#). It then lists his experience for paid clients in short, almost abbreviated tones. This attorney does not want the job. This attorney believes pro bono and helping others are more important than working in a law firm with paying clients. He should not be interviewed and hired.

**An attorney who participated in the entertainment law society in law school; was on an entertainment journal, worked in entertainment before law school and after college, worked for an entertainment company in their first and second summers in law school.** This attorney then went to a large law firm and is doing mass tort litigation and have been doing so for just over a year. They are now moving to Los Angeles from Chicago. They have told their recruiter they are interested in general litigation and [entertainment-related law firm](#) jobs. This attorney should likely never have been hired for a mass tort [litigation job](#). They do not want this job, and it should have been clear they would not stay--they want to do entertainment. The attorney also will not remain in a non-entertainment position in Los Angeles. It should have been clear from their resume that they moved to Los Angeles to get an entertainment law job. They will take a position doing something else if it is all they can get, but this is not what they want to do, and it is evident from their resume.

**An attorney went to a [top ten law school](#) and got a job with a major law firm. After a year in the major law firm, he decided to work in-house at a company in Washington, D.C. After six months, he was laid off from his in-house position and ended up getting hired as a staff attorney for a major law firm in the Midwest.** He is now looking for a law firm job, an [in-house](#) job, and anything other than his current position. He should never have been hired by the law firm in the Midwest. He did not want the job, and there was nothing on his resume, or experience, to indicate he would be likely to stay in a staff attorney position, much less work at one in the Midwest (where he had no connections). This attorney is only a few years out of law school, went to a top law school, and their objective will be to get a position with another major law firm (or in-house). They are a risk for any law firm, though, because the odds are, they want to be in-house. After all, they left to do this. This attorney most likely does not want a law firm job and certainly not one in the Midwest, or that does not pay well.

**An attorney who has had several different jobs in a short period.** An attorney has worked in three other law firms in five years. This attorney will not stay with you either and will find a reason to leave after a year or two again. This attorney is finding themselves and interested in something else--which is not your problem.

**An attorney who has spent their entire career working in Texas and has applied to positions nationwide. You are interviewing them for a position in Pittsburgh.** You question the attorney and discover that they are interested in a job you have; however, their family and everyone they know is in Texas. The odds are that even if you hire them for the position, they will return to Texas in the future. You will be much better off hiring someone locally unless the candidate is an excellent fit for the job and your position is top scale for them.

I could list countless examples of this, but if you see stuff on the person's resume that indicates they are likely to want something different, they will not be a good hire.

When I was interviewing for college positions, I wanted something different--I did not even know what I wanted. My resume was littered with references to research papers I had done to help people in Detroit get jobs, teach classes, run an asphalt company, and do other stuff that was utterly incompatible with crunching numbers in a bank or consulting firm. Moreover, no position could have given me the independence, or

income, that I wanted, and my resume bragged about the stuff I had done independently. It was all clear from my resume.

**Tip:** Look for specialists committed to (1) the practice area, (2) location, and (3) practice setting of your job. Make sure the attorney also is committed to working at a firm of your size, pay, and prestige level and has reasons for doing so. If the attorney can get closer to what they want, they will.

When I started practicing law a few decades ago, the salaries were much different than they are now. The top firms in Los Angeles were third-year associates, around \$90,000 a year. A few New York-based firms, [Skadden Arps](#), [Dewey Ballantyne](#), [Sullivan & Cromwell](#), and [Milbank](#) in Los Angeles, were paying their attorneys \$155,000 a year and giving them bonuses on top of that if they made certain hours. For me, this was a no-brainer to take a position at one of these New York-based firms paying people on a different salary scale. When I was [unhappy](#) at the New York-based firm, I was enthusiastic when I interviewed with Los Angeles-based firms that were paying almost half the salaries. None of them should have hired me without concrete explanations for why I would be willing to make so much less money.

### See also:

[Be Committed to What You Do](#)

[The Only Thing That Matters Is Commitment](#)

[Your Life Is Controlled by Your Decisions and Your Commitment to Them](#)

**The Person Who Wants the Job Typically is Never Unemployed Very Long.**

I speak with unemployed attorneys all the time--and many attorneys who have been unemployed for quite a long time. There are many commonalities with unemployed attorneys that I have noticed. While there are always reasons beyond someone's control for them [being unemployed](#), the jobless attorney is often in that role for the most obvious, Freudian-type explanation: They want to be unemployed.

When I was not getting positions in college, it was, essentially, because I wanted to be unemployed:

- I did not go to interview workshops at the school.
- I did not go to resume workshops and fix my resume.
- I did not take feedback (or go to meet) with the career services offices when they realized I was doing poorly in interviews and wanted to intervene.
- I did not [research employers](#) before interviewing with them.
- I did not talk to other students who were doing well in interviews to determine what they were doing.
- I showed up [late to some interviews](#) and missed others.
- I did not write [thank you notes](#).
- I did not appear [eager in interviews](#)--it was more about what the employer could do for me.
- I did not have a lot of respect for the interviewers because I did not want to do the work.
- I often talked a big game but was using the wrong jargon and other information.

Deep down, I was more than conflicted about whether I wanted a job--and everything about how I approached the process reflected that. This is what attorneys who are conflicted do. They are uncertain about whether they want to work for you.

People who want jobs prioritize getting jobs, do whatever they can to get a job, and are quickly hired because they look and act like someone who wants the job.

Here are some examples of attorneys I came across recently who did not want the job:

**One attorney had worked in a prominent New York law firm for a year in their corporate department before being let go and had been looking for a position for over a year.** When I asked him why he lost his job, he said that the firm required him to be in the office at 8:00 am when the managing partner (in another



office) gave out assignments each week. He was "there to work and not beg" for work. This attorney did not want his last job and had now been looking for over a year. If he wanted a position, he would have figured out how to get one in a year.

**Another attorney I was working with not too long ago had worked for a major law firm in Boston and then got an in-house position in Colorado and looked for a job for over a year.** After a few months (mainly because he said "he did not go in-house to work big firm hours"), he lost his position. This attorney simply was not interested in working. When I tried to get him to apply to firms outside of the city he was working in Colorado, he refused. He was ten years out of law school, saved money, and was not interested in working again. He is not a reasonable risk for firms.

**I interviewed a girl who graduated from law school nine months prior for a job with my company, and she had never been offered a position after graduating from law school.** When I interviewed her, she sounded unenthusiastic and not interested in making a connection. When we asked her to take a personality test, she responded that she already knew what the test would say about her and emailed us her personality type. She did not want the job and kept sabotaging herself repeatedly, which was why she was still unemployed.

There are countless law firms and other places attorneys can get jobs. It is not that the attorney has had "bad luck" because they have not tried hard enough to get a job. They have not applied to enough places, networked enough, worked on themselves enough, and more. People that are not getting jobs are most often in that position because they want to be.

The other example is the person that [takes time off](#)--a lot of time--and then wants to come back to a law firm. While there are people who have children, get sick, and have other experiences that make perfect sense and should not disqualify them--most people who take extended time off do not want to work for you. These sorts of people are interested in something else. You should not spend a lot of time with them because most will come back and leave again. They do not want the job.

My father and mother got divorced almost 50 years ago! Each had a few short second marriages of a year or two, but other than that, never remarried. If someone wants to be married and find a mate, they will quickly do so and go to any means necessary. If someone does not want to be married, they will do the opposite.

I had a plumber working on my house about five years ago, and he told me that his wife had died of cancer a few months previously. The plumber was probably in his 70s and looked very unhealthy. I felt quite sorry for him and that it would be difficult for him to meet someone new.

"Oh no! I'm happier than I have been in a long time!" he said. "I went over to the Philippines and picked up a wife!" I could not believe it. I had never heard anything like this, but I guess this is what many people do. He told me many of his friends had done the same thing!

In contrast, my parents, who are now approaching their 80s and, in my father's case, 90s, have never been able to settle down. They find all manner of excuses to disqualify potential mates and have done this between the two of them with more people than I can count. They want to be single. They would be a bad risk to marry because they would sabotage the marriage and try to be single again. This is what attorneys do who do not want to work for law firms.

### See also:

[Thank-you Notes - Handwritten or By Email?](#)

[The Best Interview Tips For Your Law Firm Interview](#)

[The Five Reasons Law Firms and Legal Employers Do Not Hire You After an Interview](#)

**The Person Who Wants the Job Does the Things to Look and Act the Part to Get the Job**

When an attorney wants the job, they do and say what they need to get the job. They go into interviews trying

to convince you that they are a good fit for the position and not the other way around. Many people will apply to jobs they do not want; most attorneys and law students do.

Here are simple things that the best people do that show they want the job.

**People that want the job will tailor their resume and cover letter to you and your job.** If someone wants the job, they will have reasons for applying to you. You should read cover letters and get a sense of the person who wants the job. People that have good reasons for working for you, in your position specifically, want the job. Their resume and cover letter should act the part.

**People who want the job will go out of their way to find people they know, learn about your firm, and find ways to get your attention before applying.** If someone wants your job, they will often talk to others in your firm, people who have worked there and more, before applying and include this information in cover letters. They do their homework and want to connect to people in your firm if possible.

**People who want the job will learn and read everything they can about you after getting an interview and show up prepared.** If someone wants the job, they will show up to interviews prepared. [They will know everything they can about you](#), ask good questions and understand who they are speaking with.

**People that want the job come across as animated, interested, and say and do the right things in interviews to show they want the job.** If [someone wants the job](#), they will be selling you on why they are a good fit. They will come across as animated and enthusiastic about working for you. They will want to get the job and not say and do things that are likely to make you not like them (asking about lousy news related to your firm, for example). They will try to connect with each interviewer and make them like them.

**People that want the job will show up on time.** If someone wants the interview, they will show up on time and make sure that no matter what happens, they are not late. Most people who are late to interviews are sabotaging themselves on purpose because they do not want the job--they do not always do this, but many do.

When I became newly single, I started noticing that many people out there could quickly pick up if I were interested in them or not and vice versa.

One woman I met told me to call her the next day to plan something, and I did not. When I finally reached out to her, she did not pick up and then sent me a text saying that she was not interested in games. If I were interested in her, I would have found a way to call her the previous day. I made one excuse or another, but she was right. I stopped the pursuit because I knew it would go nowhere for me.

Not too long ago, another woman was calling me, spending time with me, texting me, and was someone I was pretty interested in--she was someone who seemed to check all the right boxes for me. Despite that fact, when I would make arrangements to see her, she was often late and a few times canceled at the last minute. I broke it off because I realized that she had too much going on, and I was not the priority I could and should have been.

When one of my relationships ended years ago, we decided to go to therapy after being separated for months. My ex showed up to therapy dressed poorly, without combed hair, and not looking her best. She had ostensibly wanted to go to therapy, but you could tell that she did not want to be there because she was not dressing the part. She always looked her best when she tried to look suitable for people and impress, and here she was unconcerned. I knew at that point that the therapy was not going to work.

If someone is interested in you, they will do what they can to put their best foot forward.

**See also:**

[Showing Up: The Difference between Those Who Get Hired and Advance in Law Firms and Those Who Do Not](#)

[The Top Three Qualities Warren Buffett Looks for When Hiring Attorneys, Managers, and Others-and Why](#)

## This Is All You Need to Know to Hire, Get Hired, and Be a Great Employee

### The Biggest Things to Look for to See if the Attorney Wants the Job

There are a ton of things you should be looking for to see if an attorney wants the job for which they are interviewing. Here are some of the most major ones I think are most important:

**Your firm represents a move up for the attorney and looks like the natural choice for this person.** Your firm should represent a move up. It should look like it represents the natural evolution of the attorney's career and self-realization. They are finally arriving at the place where everything has been pointing them to. Ideally, your firm should offer the attorney a unique combination of benefits--work, location, people, cultural fit, and other matches that they would never be able to find elsewhere.

**The attorney has all sorts of things in their background that indicate a commitment to working in their practice area and improving.** Attorneys who are being hired in a particular practice area are likely to be the [best fit when they are committed to a specific work type](#). Having other interests is never great. Suppose someone has a historical interest in a particular type of work. If the candidate does something specific, works with certain people, gives presentations, brings in business, and does other similar things. The odds are they are committed and more likely to want the matching job. In contrast, someone who just wants a job will do whatever they need to do to get the position.

**The attorney who wants the job will try and make their resume and cover letter fit your position.** If someone wants a position, they will not send you a "form letter" but will tailor it to you specifically. Their resume will look the part for the job they are applying for and edit it for each job.

**The attorney learns everything they can about you, your job, and the people they will be interviewing with before interviewing.** People who want the job will be prepared. They use their preparation time to "psych themselves up" and not down for working for you. They are ready to ask good questions, know their interviewers, and know all about your firm.

**The attorney has only worked in law firm practice settings.** If someone has worked in other practice settings, they are likely not to be good fits and be interested in your firm--but they may be. Most attorneys who go in-house and take other sorts of positions outside of law firms or not working full time in law firms as attorneys will not be interested in your job.

**The attorney is committed to your geographic location and has reasons for being there.** [Attorneys who are relocating to an area where they are from or have family nearby are good choices](#). The attorney who is from a given site (or currently working there) is likely to stay. Someone with strong connections somewhere else is not expected to remain.

**The attorney is consistently employed without long periods of unemployment.** Attorneys who want (and need) to work are always working. Attorneys who do not want or need to work are frequently unemployed for long periods.

**The attorney tries very hard to bond with your attorneys, human resources, and other people before the interviews.** If an attorney wants the job, they will be eager and impress you to make you like them. If the attorney is not sure about the job, they will do the opposite. Most attorneys should be convincing you to hire them and not the other way around.

**The attorney is on time and responds quickly to you in the interview and offer stage.** Attorneys that want the job respond quickly and are eager to hear from you. These attorneys also accept offers rapidly. If an attorney sits on an offer for a long time, the odds are they will not stay very long and will leave when something they want more comes along.

#### See also:

[How Law Firms and Other Hiring Organizations Can Determine if an Attorney Will Do the Job Long Term](#)

[How Law Firms and Other Hiring Organizations Can Determine if an Attorney Can Be Managed](#)

[How Do Law Firms Treat "Gaps" in Your Resume?](#)

#### Conclusions

You should not hire someone who does not want the job. You need to figure this out early on. The resume



should show it and usually does. If the resume does not show it, how the person acts and behaves in interviews will clarify. If you sense the attorney is not really interested or does not care if you hire them or not, it is best to pass on them. You will be better off hiring an attorney who presents themselves well and is eager about the job.