

# A Guide to the interview

By Harrison Barnes Esq.

## How to Excel in Law Firm Interviews

We have seen the same scenario repeat itself over and over again. We send a highly qualified candidate out on an interview, only to later learn that a job offer was never extended. What went wrong? The reasons for unproductive interviews vary from one attorney to another. Furthermore, interviews are often handled differently, depending on whether the interviewee is a senior partner, an associate with one to four years of experience, or a senior associate. Hiring organizations also pose questions about certain topics at different stages of the interviewing process. However, candidates need to be ready to answer every question, whether it's posed to them during the initial screening interview, the callback interview, or during a post-offer stage. Let's review how even excellent lawyers can suddenly find themselves in need of new jobs. Then we'll take a look at some helpful pointers that will greatly increase every attorney's chances of receiving a job offer for the right position at the most opportune moment.

**You've Decided to Look into Other Opportunities** Imagine the following scenario. You are an associate in a major Chicago law firm. You accepted the firm's offer just after graduating from law school because the lawyers who hired you said they would allow you to do public company work and offered you a great salary. You even sincerely liked the partners and associates in the firm during your time there as a summer associate (at least most of the time). Furthermore, your reviews were much more encouraging back when you were a summer associate than they are now. Today, your reviewers act almost cold and calculating. You're certain that you haven't changed, so what's going on now?

You were envied by many of your law school classmates when you received an offer from such an outstanding firm. Your family even found it a bit difficult to believe. You are currently earning twice as much money as your father ever did, and you grew up in a small town outside of Rapid City, South Dakota. You are a hero of sorts among the people back in your hometown. You've heard from your younger brother, who is finishing up his last year of high school in your hometown, that your former teachers still brag about you to their other students.

However, you've been at this firm for two years, and it doesn't even come close to being the type of firm you expected it to be. Of course, you knew when you joined the firm that there would be grueling work at times that might even require you to put in many hours, seven days a week. You knew as well as anyone else that money doesn't grow on trees. You knew that you would have limited client contact when you joined the firm. Yet you've now learned that your friends who are associates in other firms in Chicago (and other markets) are being given more responsibilities and have more client contact than you have. While you are just being assigned rather mundane tasks, many of your friends are actually handling real deals. You've even discovered that associates in your own firm, who've been out of school two to three years longer than you, aren't being assigned many more responsibilities than you're currently shouldering.

After evaluating your short- and long-term career goals, your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses, and your chances for personal and professional growth at your firm, you make the decision to look elsewhere. This is not an easy decision! In fact, it may be one that you agonize over for months before ever deciding to act.

**What Happened? You Didn't Get an Offer Following Your Recent Interviews** You contacted a professional search firm. The search firm suggested that you send over your resume so it could submit it to several other big-name Chicago law firms. The search firm arranged seven interviews for you. You went to the interviews

and thought you did well, even though none of the firms really matched your interests and goals. You received three callback interviews, only to wind up without a single job offer.

You began to feel shocked, depressed, worthless, and trapped. Will you have to remain with your current firm forever? Because there are many days when you can't even stand your job anymore, you begin to worry about what will happen if others in the firm discover your true thoughts and feelings about remaining there. Does this mean that you will never become a partner? Will they fire you? Should you leave the practice of law entirely? What about your student loans?

As a graduate of a highly ranked law school, coming from a top firm, you can't understand why you're encountering problems trying to land a new job. Your professional search consultants may have never practiced in a top firm; they may not even be lawyers. They have no idea what's going wrong either. Therefore, you decide to stick it out at your current firm and continue with your unhappy existence.

You may even find yourself wanting to join the Peace Corps or teach high school English. (Weren't those things you always wanted to do?) At other times, you start wondering if you'd like to set up a solo law practice back in your small hometown outside of Rapid City. Maybe you should return to school and obtain an M.B.A. You've even started privately thinking, "Who cares about student loans and family?"

If all of this sounds a bit too difficult to believe, think again. Candidates who fit profiles similar to the general one just described continue to approach us on a regular basis. What's important to remember is that you never need to ever let your own situation become so desperate. In fact, there are attorneys out there who can truthfully tell you that they consistently get almost every job they try to land. What do these attorneys know that you haven't learned yet?

Keep in mind that no one is saying that if you apply certain principles, you will get every job you seek. You must be realistic and recognize that every job interview involves various swing factors that you cannot anticipate or control. There are even hidden agendas involved with most interviews. For example, personal chemistry and other external factors may influence whether or not a given interview goes well for you. Many times, there is very little you can do to control these factors. However, there are things you can do to overcome even personal chemistry problems. Always remember that, like other employers, legal-hiring organizations want to hire the very best person for the job.

Attorneys who consistently follow all of the pointers set forth below tend to get hired more often than other applicants.

### **Be Prepared**

Attorneys who prepare for interviews are much more likely than not to be hired. Preparation is the most important component of any interview. If you become one of our candidates, we will do everything possible to ensure that you are prepared for your interviews. We will provide you with starting-salary and bonus-structure information, facts about the people you will be speaking with, and insights into the events currently taking place inside the legal-hiring organization that are motivating the interviewers to consider hiring you. It will help you to look up recent articles about the firm so that you can learn even more about it. Find out as much as you can about the organization's operations, market niche, and corporate culture.

Be sure to review the following questions that may be posed to you during your interview. Your ability to answer these questions calmly and intelligently will indicate just how well you really have prepared yourself. Amazingly, many attorneys fail to land their dream jobs because they cannot properly answer these rather simple questions.

***Why Did You Decide to Interview for This Position?*** To give a meaningful answer to this question, you will need to know all about the different types of work the firm does and be able to clearly state why it is so

attractive to you. You must be able to convincingly express why you're interested in working on such projects. If you already know people at the firm, you need to state that you've spoken with them and that you share their outlook (be sure you speak with your contacts before the interview). You should add that you understand the reasons why these other people find the firm so attractive. However, this question can involve a trap, so beware. The interviewer may be checking to see if you will begin criticizing your current organization. You should never do so in an aggressive manner. What you can do is discuss your need for different types of work, for increased responsibilities and challenges, and your desire to be part of a firm that is growing. You may add that you also want to be working for a firm that values all of your skills. Never bad-mouth your current firm or supervisors. If you do so, you will be viewed as indiscreet and disloyal.

***What Do You Know About This Particular Legal-Hiring Organization?*** The more detailed your answer is to this question, the better. Sharp attorneys are always well prepared. This is true whether they are dealing with other attorneys, clients, or their superiors. A well-prepared answer cannot help but convey that you are good at what you do.

It is important to be prepared because the biggest trap attorneys can fall into during an interview involves thinking they can wing it based upon the strength of their charms or resumes. While it's true that you may not get to share all of the answers you prepare for your interview, it is always wise to avoid being caught off guard.

When you have prepared for an interview, you will be able to enter into it in a more focused frame of mind. As you gather additional information, you will be gaining important knowledge about the hiring organization's practices and employees. While doing this initial work, you will be able to identify attributes in yourself which match those of the legal-hiring organization. Employers want to hire people who they believe will fit in with their current staff and practices.

Because your level of preparation will likely determine how successful you are, be sure you start getting ready for each interview several days in advance. This added time will allow you to spend more time thinking about the organization and what your role might be in it. Furthermore, when you fully prepare, you're more likely to pose intelligent questions to your interviewers. (More information will be provided later in this article about the types of questions you should ask.)

### **Understand Your Goal**

There is one key goal you must focus on during each stage of the interviewing process. You need to make a positive impression. Never express concerns or doubts during an interview. There are probably plenty of candidates for the same position who will not express doubts during their interviews. Your goal is to get the job, and you can only accomplish that if you make a positive impression. You made a positive impression back when you applied to law school and when you landed your current position. Try to remember how you managed to do that. Never forget how important it is to make a positive first impression. You will have numerous opportunities in life to make a bad impression. Resist the temptation to be lazy. Arrive fully prepared. Think about everything you're planning to say during an interview before you say it.

### **Know Your Strengths**

We recommend that candidates make up a short list of approximately five of their strongest selling points related to each particular hiring organization. This list should reflect your most notable legal achievements so that it will help distinguish you from the other candidates for the job.

### **Understand the Importance of the Screening Interview**

This interview's importance will depend upon whether or not you are a junior or senior associate.

***If you are a Junior Associate*** Junior associates' reasons for wanting to move are usually quite similar. They usually want to get more or better experience. Junior associates are typically screened by the hiring organization before they are brought in for a full round of interviews. During this early phase, the interviewers are just trying to gather rather general information about each candidate.

The screening interviews conducted by law firms are usually handled by the hiring partner of the firm or by a member of the recruiting committee. The types of questions this individual will most often ask have to do with the junior associate's work and responsibilities. It is important for the candidate to avoid asking numerous questions about such subjects as salary, vacation, and benefits at this stage. The junior associate's job is simply to leave the hiring organization with the impression that he/she is hardworking, dedicated to the practice of law, easy to get along with, and mature. You must make a positive first impression at this stage. You want the firm to believe it can have confidence in you as an excellent advocate working on its behalf.

***If you are a Senior Associate*** Firms are very careful about interviewing senior associates. They will spend a considerable amount of time just deciding whether to even interview you. Unlike junior associates, the need for senior associates is typically far more defined in a legal-hiring organization. As a senior associate interviewing for a position, you will need to convincingly sell your client-management skills and work product to the firm. You will need to appear well prepared and, if hired, ready to "hit the ground running." Additionally, you must be ready for questions designed to determine if you will be able to fit easily into the firm's social structure.

Firms expect senior associates to ask a number of intelligent, probing questions during interviews. Be sure to ask questions about the individuals you will be working with and what your specific responsibilities will be so that you can determine if you will be comfortable working in the new firm's environment.

Be sure you try and tactfully discover whether there is any type of dispute surrounding your interest in the firm. It is common knowledge that firms are always a bit cautious about hiring senior associates because they will be in competition with other senior associates for partnership. Furthermore, new senior associates have yet to be trained in the firm's unique style.

***If you are a Partner Candidate*** If you are a partner candidate, you may already know the people who are interviewing you. At the screening stage, they will have only one main concern: How much business can you bring with you? Your situation is quite different from that of junior and senior associates, who must concentrate almost exclusively on selling their winning personalities and strong talents. As a partner candidate, you must be ready to give an accurate estimate of the number of clients you can bring with you and convince your interviewers that these clients will fit in well with the new firm's practice environment.

However, we are witnessing an increasing trend-especially in the Northwest-of firms' seeking out experienced partner-level candidates, even when they do not have significant business they can bring with them. One reason this is happening is that many firms are realizing that they have a significant amount of partner-level work without enough qualified senior partners to handle it. Obviously, if you're a senior partner candidate interviewing with one of these firms, it will be important for you to concentrate on selling your special talents and personality.

### **Show Enthusiasm No Matter What**

The sad fact is that some of us simply go into interviews on bad days. Others get flustered at some point in their interviews or lose enthusiasm during the latter stages of the interviewing process. No matter what your situation, you need to realize that the people who most consistently land the jobs they want are resilient and able to put their best foot forward in all of their interviews.

One poor interview can engender a negative vote that will turn a potential offer into a rejection. You must remember to think of yourself as a lawyer during each of your interviews. Lawyers need to be "up" whenever they are dealing with clients or appearing in front of a judge. You need to be resilient and keep yourself in a positive state of mind throughout every stage of the interviewing process. You must also remain calm, even if you're asked 10 separate times why you are deciding to move. Each time you answer this question, you need to respond with the same amount of enthusiasm that you displayed the first time the question was asked.

Remember that every interviewer will be watching you closely; always assume that each one has a veto.

Enthusiasm and "being up" involves more than just indicating your desire to work for a particular employer. All legal organizations want a person with spark or something that sets him/her apart. The tendency of all of us is to be circumspect and cautious during interviews. Of course, there will always be that threshold cat-and-mouse moment after you first meet when you and your interviewers will attempt to size up each other. Was your handshake too firm, too soft, or just right? Are you trying to avoid eye contact with your interviewers? Does your voice indicate that you're experiencing stressful feelings? Do you appear meek and self-effacing or filled with self-confidence and the ability to take charge of situations? Are you too aggressive or passive? All of these questions are designed to shed some light on the subjective ways your interviewers will be evaluating you.

While no one can tell you how to act with each specific person, we can tell you this: You must exude serene self-confidence without appearing arrogant. Regardless of your age, your employer expects you to be able to talk with high-ranking corporate officials and the press. When you project the right demeanor, you are indicating that you can do the job. If you miss the boat here, you stand a chance of flunking the interview and losing a great job.

You might be surprised to learn which basic mistakes you are making without even knowing it. Many of our most successful candidates have told us that they practice their interviewing skills. Some even put on the clothes they plan to wear to the interview before asking a loved one or good friend to sit down and ask them the most difficult interview questions they think might be posed to them. They then ask those who are role-playing with them to then be brutally frank about how they are presenting themselves. You don't have to be a professional interviewer to spot flaws in another person's interviewing style. Be sure you practice your interviewing techniques BEFORE you go to the real interview. Your accomplishments have gotten you in the door. The interview is the final barrier. Treat it with the importance it deserves.

### **Sell, Sell, and Sell!**

While this adage could be incorporated into some of the material already presented above, we've decided that it's so important that it needs to have its own section. You need to sell yourself. Many lawyers act like they are uncomfortable with selling. This always seems strange to us. Virtually every human being on this earth knows how to sell. You did some successful selling to land your current job. Before that, you sold yourself to your law school during the application process. To a great extent, you sell yourself every time you make a new personal friend. If you're involved in a serious personal relationship with a significant other, that means you managed to sell who you are to that person too. What have you managed to do each of those times? You convinced the other person or organization that you deserve to be treated with respect and are a very worthwhile individual. Apart from self-esteem issues, it is difficult to understand why some people aren't able to sell themselves during interviews.

A failure to sell yourself during an interview can create many negative repercussions. Lawyers who do not sell themselves run the risk of being seen as arrogant, cocky, and disinterested. Such behavior also makes the lawyers appear ignorant of the fact that many other attorneys may be competing for the same position. Always sell yourself. When you do this, you not only make yourself look better, you also make those in the hiring organization feel good about themselves because your behavior indicates that you want what they have to sell. If you were a legal-hiring organization, would you want to hire the attorney who knew how to sell him/herself or the one who did not?

### **Look Your Best**

You should be neat and clean, and your hair should be nicely cut. Male interviewees should wear a suit, a tie without any stains on it, a clean and pressed shirt, and shoes that have been recently shined. Men need to be sure that they have recently shaved or carefully trimmed their beards. Women interviewees should also wear business suits. They must wear hose and carefully choose blouses that are appropriate for the workplace. Only shoes or pumps with modest-sized heels should be worn. Women also need to avoid



overdoing their makeup. Both men and women should refrain from wearing too much cologne or perfume. It isn't necessary, and it can irritate interviewers who may have mild allergic responses to such substances.

While you aren't interviewing for a military position, you still need to remember that it's foolish to make either an emphatic or veiled countercultural statement with your clothing. More often than not, you'll be interviewing with firms whose clients are multinationals and whose businesses generate millions of dollars. They demand that those working for them demonstrate integrity not only in their work, but also in their appearance. This is because no one can escape the fact that people judge you on how you look. People tend to think (though often incorrectly) that if someone looks messy, his/her work will reflect the same carelessness. Therefore, before you go to an interview, look at yourself in the mirror. Be sure that you are as presentable as you can be. While your appearance itself won't get you the job, it can help you start out on the right foot.

Many attorneys feel they look their best when they wear a certain suit or if they exercise the day before an interview. Whatever makes you feel that you look your best, you should do it. An interviewer's first impression is influenced to a surprising degree by your physical appearance. It will affect how he/she views you and your ability to interact with clients.

### **Know Your Audience**

#### ***The Associate or Junior Partner Interviewing an Associate***

As a general rule, associates and younger partners in law firms are looking for candidates who are primarily likable. For instance, they are interested in the type of candidate they could have lunch with. Associates and younger partners are not as interested in your qualifications as they are your personality. You need to impress these people. Let them see that you are a friendly, likable person. One of the biggest mistakes that interviewees make is trying to impress younger partners and associates that they are "gunners" or extremely competitive workers. This can prove dangerous because it's an approach that may imply that you think you're a much better worker than the people who are interviewing you. While this may in fact be true, you must never let such an attitude surface during an interview with younger partners and associates. If you were granted the interview, you've got the qualifications. Concentrate on making younger partners and associates think of you as a friendly person and not as a competitor.

#### ***The Typical Partner-Associate Interview***

Remember, however, that older partners and mid-level partners are concerned with your grades and your ability to work hard. It is when you are interviewing with these particular lawyers that you can take the opportunity to tell the firm how talented you are and how hard you like to work. After all, these are the people who are most likely to make the final decision as to whether or not you should be hired. They are looking for hard workers who have the capacity to one day bring in business. However, it will still be important to them to learn that your interviews went well with the younger partners and associates. That information will naturally tell them that you are likable and that you probably get along well with others.

### **Realize That Law Firms Never Want to Hire Losers**

The firm will decide whether or not it wants to hire you based almost exclusively on how well you do during your interviews. However, legal-hiring organizations, especially law firms, never want to hire losers. Your job during any law interview is to convince the legal-hiring organization that you are not a loser.

You can categorize interviewees in many ways. The following list of three basic types of candidates tends to match the three main types of lawyers. Those interviewing you will try to figure out which lawyer profile fits you. Law firms characterize lawyers as losers, cruisers, and grinders. Cruisers and grinders will get hired, while losers will be quickly forgotten.

#### ***The Loser Candidate***

First, a law firm wants to make sure you're not a loser. Law firms believe that a loser is a candidate who acts inappropriately during the interview or doesn't appear to be truly interested in the job. Losers are also those who will be difficult to manage if hired and indicate to their interviewers that they have had significant

problems with their supervisors in their current or past positions. Law firms also believe losers are those who do not have a strong interest in practicing law or are arrogant.

Firms are always reluctant to hire interviewees who indicate that they do not like to work hard. You may also appear to be a loser to a firm if you fail to look directly at each of your interviewers during different points of the interview. All of the traits just described tend to fit losers; these attorneys rarely ever get hired. They generally make very poor lawyers and fail to thrive in a law firm environment.

### ***The Cruiser Candidate***

Cruisers represent about 30 to 40 percent of the people interviewed by law firms. A cruiser is the type of candidate who tends to do his/her work in a fairly competent manner. However, he/she never demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm for the practice of law. Furthermore, he/she never does anything to indicate that he/she is a truly outstanding lawyer who would like to make partner. At least he/she does not demonstrate a fierce drive to become a partner. Cruisers comprise the majority of people working in large law firms. They have truly exceptional backgrounds, good skills for developing clients, and are capable of doing good work. They may even make partner one day. However, though cruisers do get hired, they are generally not the most desirable candidates.

### ***The Grinder Candidate***

Grinders, on the other hand, are sought out. A grinder is a person who demonstrates a single-minded obsession with being the best performer possible. They tend to bill the most hours, they try very hard to fit in well with everyone socially, and they do very excellent work. While grinders desperately want to become partners, they manage to demonstrate their ambitious nature in appropriate ways. They also actively seek out clients. Oddly enough, some grinders fail to attract many new clients because they are so obsessed with the practice of law. In addition, these types of candidates may sometimes demonstrate certain weaknesses. However, they are usually malleable, which helps them overcome their weaknesses. These types of candidates typically get the most offers.

Though there are some exceptions to the categorizations listed above, you can be sure that losers never get hired and grinders land all of the most desirable positions.

### **Ask the Right Questions During Your Interviews**

If you have done enough research about the employer, you should be able to develop an excellent list of questions that you would like to ask. You need to make sure that you have questions ready for each of your interviewers once they ask if you have any questions. (This holds true, even if you have to pose some of the same questions more than once to multiple interviewers.) Your failure to ask questions may sometimes be interpreted as a lack of interest on your part.

The questions you ask should be direct and relevant. You want your questions to go way beyond the standard types of questions that the other interviewees will be asking. Good questions will immediately provide you with relevant information. You will have the chance to evaluate the answers and their credibility by observing the interviewers' voice tones and body language. Keep in mind that when you ask good questions, you distinguish yourself from the other interviewees. Furthermore, failing to ask certain questions may negatively affect how you are evaluated as a candidate.

### ***Prepare a List of Questions Before the Interview***

Before you go into any interview or series of interviews, you should prepare questions that you feel are direct and relevant. The process of doing this will help you prepare for the interviews and be ready when you arrive for them. You should ask questions about various aspects of the firm's practice that truly interest you. However, do not be too prying. A good tactic is to ask questions about how the firm staffs cases. The following list contains some of the excellent questions you can follow up with after your interviewers answer the first question.

How is a case typically staffed?

How many of the firm's lawyers are in a particular department? (if your prior research did not answer this question)

Is the department subdivided? If so, how?

What different responsibilities would I have?

In the litigation area, do the lawyers concentrate on major cases that are large team projects? Do the lawyers concentrate on the types of cases that typically have the same underlying factual issues? Do associates ever handle their own cases with minimal supervision?

In the transactional area, what types of deals do attorneys at my level work on? Do sellers, buyers, and promoters typically employ the firm? Are there certain types of work I will be expected to exclusively handle?

How will I get my work? Will my work be assigned from a department head, or will my work come from just one partner? Will I have to request work from individual partners?

Will I be assigned work from other departments?

Are assignments randomly given based on an associate's availability or can associates specialize in their practice?

Are there cliques within the firm that make getting work difficult if you are not a member of them?

You can come up with an almost endless list of questions to ask during an interview. Nevertheless, here are a few more that are considered acceptable inquiries.

How many billable hours are expected, and what constitutes a billable hour?

How many years does it typically take to become a partner? Are there different types of partners? Are associates expected to have significant business before they become partners?

How is the firm governed? Is there a small committee that makes all of the important decisions? Are decisions made by associates as well?

How are evaluations handled? How many people determine an associate's progress and compensation?

What type of training does the firm do?

What are the firm's overall growth prospects? What are they in your specific practice area?

Are partners accessible?

Do associates get significant experience early in their careers? If not, why not?

What do the interviewers like most about the firm? What do they think needs to be changed?

Never ask about salary or benefits during an interview. In addition, never ask whether the firm frequently terminates attorneys. It is also wise to avoid requesting specific information about your prospects for becoming a partner. It is your recruiter's job to obtain this information for you. It's quite possible that the firm may even voluntarily offer this information to you during the interview.

### **Do Not Act Nervous**

You should practice interviewing in front of a mirror with a friend or your spouse. During one week this year, we saw three attorneys come from other states or from abroad for a series of interviews with law firms. Not one of these individuals received a single job offer. How could that happen? We learned that all of the candidates appeared far too nervous during their interviews. Sometimes, people completely leave behind their usual personalities when they go into interviews and become excessively nervous. Candidates typically leave interviews where they've appeared extremely nervous without even realizing how they came across to their interviewers. You need to ensure that you are not excessively nervous during your interviews. Try to avoid moving around or fidgeting constantly. Don't say "you know" numerous times or laugh inappropriately. All of these behaviors reflect excessive nervousness.

You need to exude confidence during your interviews. Would you want a nervous lawyer representing you in court or handling multi-million-dollar transactions? You get the point. You need to approach your interviews with confidence. Let the interviewers see you demonstrate the same type of focus you usually project when taking part in important client meetings.

None of this is meant to say that just being a little nervous will harm your chances. In fact, the adrenaline that starts pumping when you are nervous can actually help you excel in your interviews. Just try to stay aware of



how you are really behaving and attempt to hide your nervousness as best you can. Arriving on time and well prepared can really help minimize your nervousness.

### **Prepare Honest, Positive Answers to Possible Interview Questions**

There are certain cardinal rules that characterize what you should be doing during each interview. If you study the following list of some of these rules and their descriptions, you should be able to improve your interviewing skills.

#### *Cardinal Rule 1: Never Bad-mouth Your Present Employer*

You should never bad-mouth your present employer or boss. This mistake can make you appear both disloyal and unprofessional.

#### *Cardinal Rule 2: Never Speak in Detail about a Client's Case*

Never reveal specific details about any of your current clients' cases. You need to come across as an attorney who can be trusted and who views confidential matters seriously. Your interviewers want to know that you will protect the confidentiality of their clients' secrets.

#### *Cardinal Rule 3: Be Honest*

You must always be honest during your interviews. Don't let your enthusiasm for the job cause you to start making slight exaggerations. Never fail to reveal crucial information you're being asked to provide. Do not try to adeptly avoid a question about your past or present job experiences or academic performance. Always remember that no law firm expects you to be superhuman. No attorney is perfect. In fact, letting others know about some of your weaknesses can often make you appear more human and attractive to employers. People tend to reject those who try to portray themselves as perfect individuals.

Of course, all attorneys are trained to highlight facts that paint a favorable picture of their clients. You can do this on your own behalf if you do not exaggerate anything or omit crucial facts.

#### *Cardinal Rule 4: Never Reveal a Sour Grapes Attitude*

No matter what type of question you are being asked during an interview, you should never answer with a reply that reflects a sour grapes mentality. Each answer you give needs to be upbeat in some way. Think about this from your own experience. Do you prefer to be around people who are positive or negative? The same principle applies to interviewing. When you provide upbeat answers to the questions, you will come across as a positive person. Such responses also make the interviewers think that you are psychologically healthy. Your positive attitude can even help the people interviewing you feel at ease and good about themselves.

#### *Cardinal Rule 5: Allow the Interviewers to Reach Their Own Conclusions*

The best attorney interviewers allow those questioning them to reach their own conclusions about their overall qualifications and suitability for each position they pursue. You cannot force the person interviewing you to support you simply because you have well-prepared answers to their questions. However, effective answers to interview questions can obviously help you educate the interviewers about why you are the best attorney for the position. Simply provide your answers in such an open and pleasing manner that your interviewers will all but forget the five other people they already interviewed for the same position earlier in the week.

#### *Cardinal Rule 6: Evaluate Your Resume from Each Interviewer's Perspective*

Before each interview, you should try to review your resume from the perspective of the particular hiring organization that will be interviewing you that day. Bear in mind that a resume makes a statement regarding both the information it provides and doesn't provide. Your resume will be in front of every interviewer you meet and will guide their questioning of you. We review thousands of resumes a year. We learn quite a bit about all of these attorneys just from reviewing their resumes. You must learn to anticipate questions about

what your resume says and what you (may have) intentionally omitted.

*Cardinal Rule 7: Completely Review Your Own Background Before the Interview*

Given the importance of this point, it might have been best to list it first. You may be asked questions about your most challenging assignments, where you see yourself in five years, what your personal philosophies are, and what type of work environment you like. A well-prepared attorney knows him/herself and is prepared for whatever questions come his/her way. By knowing yourself, you reflect the type of confidence employers want to see. Nothing comes across worse to an interviewer than a wishy-washy attorney who has no real idea who he/she is or why he/she is interviewing with a particular firm.

*Cardinal Rule 8: Make Sure Your Answers Are Short, Concise, and to the Point*

An attorney whose answers are long-winded and who thinks out loud cannot help but convey the message that he/she might behave that same way with a client. Interviewers want short, clear, and definite answers. Such responses tell the interviewers that the attorney they are interviewing knows him/herself and is confident. Long-winded answers convey indecision and the inability to quickly provide appropriate responses.

*Cardinal Rule 9: Know Your Audience*

The fact is that you may need to tailor your answers a bit in regard to the particular person who will be interviewing you. Most interviewees have a good sense for the different types of attorneys that might interview them. While you never want your answers to sound too formal or too loose, the fact is that an associate or senior partner might be impressed by different types of answers. Similarly, different types of attorneys may have unique types of personalities. Stated differently, some personality types will simply be more receptive to certain types of answers.

*Cardinal Rule 10: Never Allow Yourself to Become Too Relaxed*

No matter how comfortable you feel or how relaxed the person interviewing you may seem, never get too relaxed with your answers. Never provide answers that reveal highly personal aspects of your private life.

Never present yourself as being too relaxed. If you find yourself interviewing with a firm that has no formal dress code, it will still be inappropriate for you to not wear a suit to the interview. Becoming too relaxed, for one reason or another, may be taken as a sign of disrespect to the hiring organization. Many interviewees fall into this trap and lose positions because of it. Do not let this happen to you.

Remember, your job is to communicate that you are likable and a professional. You should not try to convey that you are the legal-hiring organization's buddy. You need to be perceived as a competent person who will do his/her work properly, get along with others, and respond well to authority.

**Be On Time**

Too many good attorneys lose great positions because they are late to interviews. While this is not an insurmountable problem, the fact that you've arrived late for an interview can make you unduly nervous. No one looks good if he/she is sweating during his/her first interview. You may even disrupt several interviewers' schedules. You will also have to justify your lateness during each interview. This may lower your self-confidence and cause you to not sell yourself as effectively as you might have if you had just arrived on time.

Plan to arrive at the building where the interview will be held at least 30 minutes before you have to be on the 22nd floor for your interview. You can examine every magazine in the lobby newsstand and catch up on current events. You might even want to take a favorite magazine with you that you haven't had a chance to read yet. You want to arrive on the 22nd floor approximately two minutes before your interview is scheduled to begin.

**Let the Recruiting Meal Put You Ahead of the Game**

The recruiting breakfast, lunch, or dinner is important! In fact, we have seen many highly qualified candidates

fail to receive offers because they did not excel during this meal. Sometimes, candidates actually manage to make unusual errors during these meals. We honestly have no idea why so many interviewers like to meet with candidates in such settings. In many respects, we consider the interviewing meal to be overvalued. Nevertheless, it is important, and candidates need to do well during it.

In business and legal circles, most people ask others to lunch in order to develop or maintain business relationships. How you behave in social situations can say a lot about you. While we could turn our suggestions about how you should behave during one of these meals into a book, we will choose instead to just provide you with some basic rules of behavior.

#### *Cardinal Rule 1: Wait in the Lobby for Your Host*

It is bad manners to take a seat at a table until your host has appeared. Because the legal profession is a very demanding and sometimes unpredictable one (due to phone calls, added filings, and other issues), your host may often be late. Wait in the lobby. You should allow your host to walk with you to the table and not feel like he/she has inconvenienced you by being late.

#### *Cardinal Rule 2: Eat at the Same Pace as Your Host*

For example, if the person with whom you are dining is a slow eater, you need to be sure that you do not finish long before he/she does.

#### *Cardinal Rule 3: Order Only the Basics*

Do not order an appetizer or a dessert unless your host does so first. Never order the most expensive thing on the menu. However, if the other participants in the meal order appetizers or desserts (or if your host suggests that you feel free to do so), go ahead.

#### *Cardinal Rule 4: Determine the Appropriate Price Range by Asking Your Hosts What They Are Planning to Order*

This is the best way to learn if a specific menu item is too expensive.

#### *Cardinal Rule 5: Treat Your Meal Servers with Respect*

How you treat the server will say a lot about how you are likely to treat secretaries and others within the legal-hiring organization. Never be disrespectful to the servers.

These cardinal rules are not included here to simply remind you of Emily Post's great wisdom. You need to remember these pointers. Should you actually be someone who needs to know how to hold your fork or where to put your napkin, you will need to do additional reading. Just remember that the interview lunch is a test of your social skills and grace. Some people take years to learn these skills.

Though you might be asked important questions during the meal, its main purpose is to test your ability to make small talk and get along with others. Do not let your guard down! Too many attorneys forget this important warning. The interviewing meal needs to be approached with the same level of enthusiasm and professionalism that you exhibit during the more formal interview stages.

#### **Listen**

Last, but not least, you need to LISTEN during your interviews. Though if you're nervous, you might wish you could do all of the talking, be sure you listen carefully to what your interviewers are asking and saying. Keep in mind that many individuals like other people the most who allow them to talk about themselves. Many of the attorneys you will be interviewing with will really cherish the opportunity to talk about themselves and their accomplishments. Let them talk and try to appear truly interested in what they are sharing. This will make them feel good about themselves and appreciate your attentiveness.

Attorneys are expected to know how important it is to be a good listener. Most people become attorneys so

they can try and help solve other people's problems. You can't really help someone until you have truly listened to them and gained some understanding of their problems. Attorneys who do not care about their interviewers' opinions are rarely ever hired.

**Remember That the Interview Isn't Completely within Your Control**

Regardless of how well you prepare and no matter how well you fit a firm's ideal profile, an interview can still go poorly without really being anyone's fault. Personal chemistry is often the culprit.

It is our job at BCG Attorney Search to eliminate any and all misconceptions on behalf of both the candidate and the law firm before a first meeting takes place. However, unexpected glitches do occur sometimes. Hiring requirements can change dramatically based on the loss or addition of a client. An employee from another office might be brought in to fill a vacancy. A person who was planning to leave may decide to stay at the last minute, leaving you out in the cold. Be prepared for the unexpected. Life is like that. If you become one of our candidates, your resume will probably be submitted to more than one firm. When we agree to take you on as a client, we stick with you. We will "exhaust the well" while trying to help you land the job you deserve.

No matter how each interview turns out, we wish you all of the luck in the world as you continue to search for a better future. We hope this information will help you find a job that will allow you to become the star you deserve to be. Naturally, if we can help, let us know.

[Appendix I: Videoconference Interviews](#)