



ATTORNEY SEARCH

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Are You a “Me-Focused” or a “You-Focused” Interviewee?

When most attorneys prepare for job interviews they come up with lists of questions they should ask. Most of these questions are questions to which the candidates/interviewees (the people interviewing for the jobs) would like to have answers. However, most attorneys do not consciously realize that questions generally fall into two categories.

The first type of question is “me-focused.” A me-focused question is a question to which you, the interviewee, would like to have an answer. On the other hand, a “you-focused” question deals with the interests and needs of the interviewers.

During an interview, you only have a few minutes to make a very good impression on the partners (who are the most relevant decision makers), and assuming your goal is to receive an offer, you need to choose selectively the types of questions you ask them.

The questions you ask provide the partners with a clear window into your head; questions illustrate your mindset and suggest your priorities and goals. They show where you’re at in your head. As such, understanding the differences between me-focused and you-focused questions can have a tremendous impact on your interview success with partners.

Me-Focused Questions

Here is a list of the most common me-focused questions that interviewees typically ask:

- What type of training will I receive?
- What types of resources will you provide me?
- Will I get to work on [insert type of work *you* are most interested in]?
- What are the average billable hours? (Subtext: How hard will I have to work?)
- How much are bonuses? (Subtext: How much money will I receive?)
- Will I have opportunities to work on pro bono matters?

As you can see, these are all very legitimate questions which many interviewees would certainly like to have answered. But here’s the critical point: these questions do not focus at all on the needs or interests of the partners who are interviewing you.

Oftentimes, candidates will make the mistake of asking all of their me-focused questions up front. Once they receive positive answers, they are very enthusiastic. On the other hand, the interviewers/partners walk away feeling that they have answered a lot of questions that were of interest to the interviewee, but they have very limited information as to why the interviewee would be a good fit.

Are You a “Me-Focused” or a “You-Focused” Interviewee?

If you step back and understand the purpose of an interview—at least through the employers' eyes—it is to determine whether you are the appropriate person to assist with their needs. *Their needs*, not yours. I do not mean to suggest that your needs or interests are not important, as they certainly are, but if you cannot first demonstrate that you can meet the needs of the employers, the discussion is over.

Many times, me-focused questions can be answered by online research, or interviewers will volunteer this information during the interview. If the information is not volunteered, one common strategy is to wait until you have an offer in hand to ask the very me-focused or difficult questions; you can also wait until you have already asked the you-focused questions.

You-Focused Questions

You-focused questions are typically much more effective to start off with because, after all, they focus on the needs and interests of the interviewers/partners.

Here are some examples of the most common you-focused questions that interviewees ask:

- Where could you use the most support right now in your practice?
- What precipitated your hiring need right now?
- What would be your ideal candidate for this position?
- Are there any particular characteristics of attorneys who do especially well in your practice group?
- What do you like about practicing in your group/firm?

Do you notice a difference? Do you see how the focus is on “you” and “your” rather than “me” and “I”?

The beauty is that when you ask the you-focused questions, you will gain a much better idea of the interviewers' specific needs. Also, it demonstrates that you have an interest in learning about how you can fit into their practice *based on their needs*.

My candidates have told me that when they ask you-focused questions, something amazing happens. The interviewers immediately get more energized and interested in the interview. It is as if they think, “Finally, somebody is interested in how they can help me!” Even if you do not do very much selling of yourself, the impression the interviewers walk away with is “This person understands my/our needs,” and this puts you at a distinct advantage.

Conclusion

This article just touches on one of the many important aspects of a successful interview. But if you keep this distinction in mind and consciously focus on you-focused questions from the outset, you will separate yourself from most of the other me-focused candidates.

Happy interviewing!