Interviewing For Legal Positions

Duke University School of Law
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What All Employers Want to Know
1. Do you present well?

- Are you dressed appropriately?
- Are you self-confident, yet respectful?
- Are you friendly, enthusiastic?
- Is your handshake firm?
- Do you appear engaged, interested?
  - Consistent eye contact, non-verbal gestures
- Do you appear poised, or caught off guard?
- Are you overly nervous?
  - Calm, steady voice
75% of what you communicate is non-verbal.
- The way you carry yourself;
- Your demeanor;
- Your body language;
- The way you speak.

Employers are first looking to see if you are a professional. If you don’t pass that initial test, your answers to their questions won’t matter.
2. What makes you so special?

- May come in the gentler forms of “Tell me about yourself” or “What brings you here today?”
- Your answer needs to immediately set you apart, succinctly informing the interviewer how you are distinctly different from other candidates.
  - They want to know why you should jump to the front of the pack.
- Be ready to highlight your passions, your relevant experiences, and relate your core qualities and skills back to the work of the employer.
3. Are you capable, focused?

- Do you know who you are?
- Do you know what you want?
- Do you know where you want to be?
  - Why *here* of all places?
- Do you know what you have to offer?
- Can you do the work?
- Do share a common commitment or passion?
4. Can you carry a conversation?

- Are you comfortable engaging in dialogue?
  - Both substantive and casual?
- Is there a natural flow to the conversation?
- Have you simply responded to the questions or have you become a “partner” in the discussion?
- Do you answer questions concisely & directly?
- Are your contributions deliberate and thoughtful?
5. Are you prepared?

- Have you done specific research?
- Can you articulate your specific interest with precision?
- Do you have questions for the interviewer?
  - Are they engaging and tailored to both the employer and the interviewer?
  - Are they focused on how you might add value to the interviewer and his/her ongoing work?
- Do you have copies of your resume, transcript, writing sample & references on hand?
Inside An Interviewer’s Mind…

- Ambitious and Hard Working?
- Leader v. Follower?
- Brilliance v. Bad Behavior?
- Serious About Us?
- Ties to the city?
- Pulse – energy?
- People skills?
- Focus?
- Long-term commitment to private practice/government/cause?
6. Are you a good “fit”?

- The intangible factor...
  - Natural rapport established?
  - Do your interests, outlook and personal style appear to align with the organization and its members?
  - Are you someone with whom I can work long hours, and can I relate to you on a professional, intellectual and emotional level?

- The Big Question:
  **Do I Want to See and Deal with You Every Day?**
What To Expect
A Typical Screening Interview

- One-shot deal.
  - Typically, a single 20–30 minute interview with one person.
- Goal is simply to advance the ball by leaving the interviewer with the impression that you are:
  - Hard-working;
  - Dedicated to the practice of law;
  - Easy to get along with; and
  - Mature.
A Typical Callback

- A series of separate 30-minute interviews back to back.
- Interviewers typically do not share information – may complete a form when you leave and never discuss you again.
- Therefore, each 30-minute interview must stand on its own as your complete “sell.”
Time Allocation of 30-Minute Callback Interview

- Welcome: 1
- Assess: 5–10
- Answer Questions / Sell: 15–18
- Conclude Interview: 1
- Notes and Transition: 2
How To Prepare
Consider Your First Impression

- Make sure that you consider all aspects of a first impression. Be early, well groomed, professionally dressed and personable.
- Record a professional voicemail greeting.
- Regarding attire, *be conservatively unmemorable.*
- And TURN OFF YOUR CELL/SMART PHONES!
  - No reading emails, texting or web surfing while you wait – read the Wall Street Journal instead.
Find out as much possible about the employer and the interviewer(s) prior to the interview.

Employers consistently rank lack of knowledge of the organization as one of the primary reasons for not extending an offer.
In addition to the employer’s website, a Lexis–Nexis or Westlaw check will provide information on recent matters in which the organization has been involved.

A search of legal news files and periodicals will also direct you to relevant articles.
Realize That You Are Your Only Advocate

- If you don’t enthusiastically market yourself, no one else will.
- There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance, but interviews are NOT the time to be modest or shy.
- You need to create another advocate in the interviewer, so that they carry the torch for you long after the interview ends.
- Take the time to identify and practice communicating your successes, and emphasizing the match between your goals and the goals of the employer.
Realize that nothing in an interview is pointless “small talk.”

You MUST have three key elements about yourself you want to convey during each interview – your “headlines” or “narrative.”

Be an active conversationalist vs. a passive responder.
- Do not answer questions with “yes” or “no.”

Take advantage of every opportunity to gracefully incorporate your headlines into nearly every answer you provide.
Be Intentional About Setting A Positive Tone

- Smile.
- Be nice to everyone from the receptionist all the way up the chain of command.
- When you are answering or asking a question, be enthusiastic.
  - Pick something that excites you and let that show through.
Be Prepared To Spin The Negatives Around

- If personal weaknesses or mistakes are raised (or need to be), acknowledge them head on without excuse while couching them in terms of future motivators or lessons learned.

- Do not dwell on the negative and allow it to dominate your time together.
Key Interviewing Skills Demonstrated
Thank You Letters

- A thank you letter is a must following any interview, and should be sent 24-hours after your interview.
- Letters sent via regular mail or e-mail are both acceptable.
- It is recommended that you send a thank you letter to each person that participated in the interview.
When writing your thank you letters:
- Make sure that you have the proper spelling and title of each person who interviewed you.
- Personalize them, including specific information that was discussed during the interview.
- As a general rule, “less is more.”
Questions?

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