

Interviews

Whether you are interviewing with employers recruiting on campus or with an employer you contacted on your own, **you must be prepared**. It is not unusual for a student to spend hours doing everything possible to get an interview, only to sit back and do nothing once they get it. The interview will not take care of itself. Unless you prepare ahead of time, you will in all likelihood fall on your face. You will waste precious time asking unnecessary questions. You need to read brochures, firm resumes, and annual reports. Anything that will help to provide you with a clear understanding of the firm or organization.

Read any and all printed material available on the firm/organization. Many law firms today produce law firm resumes which gives students an overview of the firm. The Office of Law Career Strategies has many of these resumes on file, but obviously not all. Those that are on file can be checked out. If there is not a firm resume on file for the particular firm in which you are interested, make a phone call and ask them to send you a copy if they have one. Many small firms do not produce a firm resume. In that case, look for whatever information is in Martindale-Hubbell. A number of corporations are also producing corporate brochures for students. If none is available, ask for an annual report. All corporations produce annual reports and they are easily obtainable.

The National Association for Law Placement publishes the Directory of Legal Employers each year. This directory is a collection of NALP questionnaires and firm resumes and is available in the Career Resource Center. Another very good source of a variety of information is the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory. Besides the obvious personal data provided on each firm member, you can get a feel for the average age of the firm members. Where were the people born (are they all from the east?)? What sort of emphasis is placed on academic awards (are they all members of Order of the Coif?)? Is everyone a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the Law Review? Do Moot Court activities seem to be prevalent? What is the geographic distribution? Does everyone seem to come from the same state? Did everyone go to the same law school (or two, or three?)? Is it a diverse firm geographically? Read between the lines. Find out as much as possible.

Not only should you read printed material about the employer, but it is important to **talk to as many people as possible to find out what they know about an employer**. Fellow classmates make a good start. Take advantage of the student

grapevine (not to be confused with the rumor mill) to educate yourself. Ask students who have worked at or interviewed with the firm about their experiences. Ask them if they know anyone that you could talk to about the employer. Talk to faculty members, administrators, and most of all, law school alumni.

It is also helpful to **learn something about the person(s) who will be doing the interviewing**. In the case of on-campus interviews, the Office of Law Career Strategies requests the names of interviewers prior to the interview date. This information can change (and frequently does), so you should be prepared. Don't let that situation throw you. Take it all in stride.

If you are interviewing off-campus, it may be more difficult to find out who the interviewer will be. If it is a small firm, you can pretty much count on meeting the attorney who set up the interview. If it is a larger firm or corporation that is arranging the interview through the Recruiting Coordinator or Personnel Director ask them for an agenda. In any case, you should try to find out who will be interviewing you.

If you do know ahead of time the name(s) of the interviewer(s), your best reference source will be Martindale-Hubbell. As was mentioned earlier, it is a source usually under utilized. It is here that you can find the age, hometown, school background, awards, honors, and the like about your interviewer. Try running a Lexis check on your interviewer. You can sometimes find out what cases on which s/he has been working, court opinions, and the like. People you know at the firm or friends can provide information you will not find in books.

Be careful not to flaunt your preparation. If you have adequately prepared for the interview, it will come across. Allowing your preparation to come across naturally will help to create a positive impression. Be careful not to ask a question just to ask a question. If you already know the answer, don't waste your time or the interviewer's time by acting dumb. Use this time effectively to gather facts which you don't already have. Use your knowledge to ask intelligent questions.

First impressions are very important in the interview. It is said that in many first interviews a decision is made in the first minutes as to whether you will be invited back for a second interview. How you dress for an interview is important. The interviewer is going to judge you, like it or not. This is not the time to make some point of being anti-establishment or independent by dressing in a manner that might offend the interviewer. If you care enough to go to the interview, why blow it by dressing in an inappropriate manner?

Choose clothing which is conservative and professional looking. Appear clean, neat, and well groomed. Needless to say, interviews are not opportunities to experiment with new clothing styles. Avoid extremes. Your safest bet is to dress the part. For men this means a good quality suit. Shirt, tie, shoes, and socks are important, too. Don't ruin the positive impression you have created with your new suit by wearing old, beat-up dress shoes.

Dresses and pant suits are becoming more acceptable if you are very careful. If you are going to wear a dress, it should be an extremely professional, probably jacketed dress. A suit or a skirt and jacket are most appropriate. Women should be sensitive to, but should not avoid dressing based on gender. Remember that you will be interviewing with men in most instances and they will generally be traditional and conservative. Use your common sense. It will not be in your best interest to play up your femininity by dressing provocatively for an interview. On the other hand, it is unnecessary to deny your femininity by dressing in too masculine a fashion. There is no need for a woman to downplay her attractiveness however, avoid dressing in a manner so as to flaunt it.

Be sure that you look good in what you buy. A general rule-of-thumb is to stick to darker, more conservative colors, particularly blues and grays. Differing shades enable you to pick and choose that which is best suited for you. Avoid extremes. Red may be your ideal color, but it may also set you apart in an unfavorable way. You want to be remembered for who you are and what you can contribute to the firm, not because you wore a suit that caught everyone's eye.

A note on **grooming**: There is one constant that applies to both men and women in all interviewing situations. **Be neat and clean.** Make sure your hair is cut and in place. Beards and moustaches must be neatly trimmed. Your clothes should be clean and pressed, shoes polished and no dirty fingernails. A person sloppy in appearance may be sloppy in other ways.

Invest a little money to make sure you are appropriately dressed for your interviews. You have worked too hard and come too far to risk an employment possibility because you didn't take the time to dress right.

Consider the following. You send out your resume minus any indication of your academic performance. You were called in for an initial interview and have already talked with several members of the firm. You feel good about the initial impression you have made. You are, in fact, enthusiastic about the possibility of a job opportunity. No mention of grades has been made thus far. Now you are sitting in a

chair across the desk from the hiring partner of the firm. Mr. Hiring Partner makes a few casual remarks to put you at ease and then asks "I see you didn't note your grades on your resume. How are you doing in law school?" or more bluntly, "What is your GPA?". You stutter and stammer. You had thought you were off the hook on that questions. What do you do?

It is a natural reaction to be uptight and defensive when asked about grades in an interview if you have not performed as well in law school as you expected. If you performed well as an undergraduate (and just about everyone in law school did, or they wouldn't be in law school), it is doubly difficult to accept a mediocre grade point average and next to impossible to deal with a poor performance.

In order to avoid the above scenario, you must educate yourself to the realities of the legal marketplace. Different legal employers establish criteria they are looking for in applicants. If you take time to find out what characteristics are important to what employers, you will save yourself from applying to employers with which you don't have a realistic chance. For example, it is common knowledge that large private law firms discriminate against certain students based on that one criterion. If your grades are not in line with what is typically expected of applicants, you are only setting yourself up for awkward situations and frustrations. This does not mean that someone who does not meet the grade point requirement for a firm has no chance of getting in. It does happen, but usually not through the normal route. It usually happens because of connections that got a student in for the initial interview and they were able to "sell" themselves to the firm. To make life easier on yourself, you should apply only to those employers for whom your application is a realistic one in the first place.

Believe it or not, there are employers who will hire students without outstanding grades. They will be more concerned with your attitude toward your grades and your personality. If you are convinced of your abilities and communicate those feelings to the interviewer, you will have gone a long way toward helping yourself.

It may help your perspective if you keep in mind that just about everyone has something in their past that they'd rather not have to discuss. If your "skeleton" is work or school related, you can bet there is a good chance that an interviewer will want to know something about it. Your best defense then is to always be prepared to answer. If you wait to formulate an answer until the question you are dreading is asked, you are setting yourself up to fail. Your lack of preparation will be evident to the interviewer and will only reflect poorly on you.

In answering touchy questions, you are better off being truthful. Just be sure

to phrase the truth in a positive manner. Deal with issues such as gaps in employment experience, breaks in the educational process, divorce, children, age, and of course, grades honestly. Not being honest with the interviewer about your particular situation will make it more difficult for you to appear relaxed and confident. Your hesitation in responding to particular questions will come across negatively. Just remember that not being truthful always has a tendency to catch up with you sooner or later.

Federal laws prohibit an interviewer or prospective employer from discriminating in the employment process on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, national origin, handicap, or age. However, these laws do not prohibit questions regarding any of these areas. Each state has a Fair Employment Practices Commission, or equivalent, which further refines the nature of an interview. Generally, the key to a rational determination of the propriety of an interview question rests upon whether or not the information requested would prevent the applicant from being able to perform the work in a satisfactory manner.

Employers may not base employment decisions on the answers to questions regarding an applicant's arrest record, citizenship or birthplace, marital or parental status, number of children and family planning, and type of military discharge. Some states also include considerations of physical appearance, sexual preference, mobility to travel, or physical or mental handicaps.

While this may imply that you have a significant degree of statutory protection, you should be aware that an interviewer's questions, without proof of resulting discrimination, will probably not constitute a valid claim. The questions must have been asked for the purpose of discriminating against you or have the effect of discriminating against you. Therefore, to substantiate a claim, be prepared to prove either deliberate intent to discriminate, or a direct cause and effect between the discriminatory question and your failure to be hired. Either of these requirements would normally be difficult to substantiate.

Inexperienced interviewers will often ask inappropriate questions without thinking about it. The practiced interviewer rarely makes the mistake of asking an explicitly discriminatory question and can elicit the information, without violating the law, by referring to sensitive status areas indirectly. For example:

- * referring to dates of school attendance to ascertain age of applicant;
- * questioning present residence and duration of residence rather than birthplace or citizenship;

- * questioning possible name change necessary to obtain a check on past work record, rather than maiden name or divorce;
- * questioning convictions rather than arrests.

What should you do when confronted with a question you consider impertinent or tactless? Unfortunately, to be considered for employment, you must usually cooperate during the interview. There are differences of opinion concerning how to respond to an offensive inquiry. The choice depends upon your perspective in balancing the protection of personal rights against the need for a job. Some suggestions might include:

- * answer the question, but counter the question with an assertive (not sarcastic) response;
- * answer the question, but tactfully acknowledge the pertinent law regarding the matter;
- * feign astonishment or amusement, while declining to answer.

The safest and most beneficial route is to presume that the interviewer is asking the legal question. In responding, rephrase the question by addressing the legitimate issue. ie: "Do you have any children?" "I presume you're asking if I have any barriers to traveling or working long hours, in which case I don't."

If you feel victimized by discrimination, contact the Director of Law Career Strategies or the Associate Dean. Be prepared to be specific in addressing claims or allegations. If appropriate, measures will be taken to rectify the situation.

On the following pages are some standard and/or difficult interviewing questions. Think through your answers to these questions. Practice your answers to these questions. Do whatever it takes to be prepared - write down the answers, discuss them with others, rehearse them in a tape recorder, practice them in front of a mirror.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

An interview is an opportunity for a mutual exchange of information. One way to prepare yourself is to practice answering questions. Below are sample questions that may be asked in an interview.

General Questions/Background Information

Tell me about yourself. Expand on your resume.
What do you consider to be your greatest strength? Weakness?
How would you describe yourself? How would a friend describe you?
Why should we hire you?
Why would you be an asset to our firm?
What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?
How do you work under pressure?
Why do you feel you would be successful as an attorney?
What has been your most disappointing experience?
How do you spend your spare time?

Questions on Career Objectives

Why did you choose this career?
Would you like to specialize in any area of law?
How would you describe the ideal career position for you?
What is the most important thing to you in a career?
What are your long-term or short-term goals?
Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
What do you expect to be earning in 5 years? 10 years?
Why do you want to come to this city?
Why do you want to work for us?

Questions on Educational Background

Why did you choose Ohio Northern University?
What courses did you like best? least?
Tell me about your grades. What is your class rank?
Tell me about your undergraduate grades. Class rank.

Questions on Experience

Explain your most recent work experience.
What did you like most/least about your experience.
What motivates you?
How is your work experience relevant to our practice?
What skills can be transferred to our firm/practice?
What community or extracurricular activities have you been involved with?
If you do not have any legal experience, why?

Questions on your Job Search

What is your geographical preference?
Do you have ties in this area?
Do you think you would be able to adjust to this area of the country?
Why did you choose our firm/company?
What do you know about us?
How did you learn about us?
What do you think it takes to be a successful firm?
Are you interviewing with any other firms?

Stress Questions

What is your work philosophy?
What is your best quality? Your worst quality?
Why do you think you are worth this amount?
How long will we pay you before you add to our profits?
How many other offers do you have?
How do I know that you have good analytical skills?
How important is money to you?
Describe your ideal work environment.
How important are status, prestige, and power to you?
What are the key reasons for your successes? Failures?
What type of decisions do you find most difficult to make?
What are you working hardest at to improve?
What type of people really turn you off?
How do you react to criticism?
How do you resolve conflict between other people?
Justify your salary expectations.
What job-related tasks do you really dislike?

After conducting an interview, a prospective employer will often ask what questions the candidate has. Many interviewers will be extremely surprised and curious if the candidate has none. Frequently the interview will naturally raise some questions in your mind. This is the time to ask them. In addition, some concerns on your part might include the following:

Salary/benefits concerns (if these haven't already been addressed)

What are the specific responsibilities of a first year associate?

What kind of support help, both secretarial and equipment, will be made available?

What kind of hours are expected?

What kind of performance/salary review is practiced?

What kind of hiring time table is the firm using; when can you expect to hear from them?

SCREENING INTERVIEWS

Sometimes called initial interviews, screening interviews allow interviewers to see large numbers of applicants in a short period of time. These interviews are usually between twenty and thirty minutes in length. The screening interview allows the interviewer to gather facts and seek out those applicants who lack necessary communication skills, intellectual ability, and the like. During a screening interview and interviewer is looking for reasons not to recommend you for further interviews.

On-campus interviews, consortium interviews, and initial interviews at firm offices are screening interviews. Expect the unexpected during the screening interview. Attorneys asked to interview are often unprepared for or uninterested in the task. Don't be surprised if you meet an interviewer who has not read your resume prior to the meeting or only did so moments before entering the interview room. They are also often unfamiliar with their own firm's resume.

Since most firms select somewhat randomly those to represent their firm at the law school, it is not unusual to meet attorneys who are uninterested in the whole process and are only there because they have to be. Many interviewers are never trained to interview. Fear that their inexperience will show through will cause them to treat the interview process as an unwanted burden. Finally, far too many firms send individuals to campus who have few interpersonal skills. They make very poor interviewers. This is not to say that you won't meet people on-campus who enjoy the process, are pleased to have time out of the office, value recruiting as necessary for the future of the firm and consequently take time to prepare for interviews. You need to be ready to meet a variety of personalities during screening interviews.

Ask questions? In addition to convincing the interviewer that you merit a

second interview, it is important for you to collect information about the firm. The interview is a two way street. You need to make an informed decision too. Get the interviewer to share their feelings about the firm. How did they get there? What is their typical day like? What do they deem to be the greatest and worst aspects about the firm? Interviewers are human beings, too. Most will warm up to the chance to express themselves. And while doing so, will provide you with a treasure chest of information. Ask the same question of different people. If the summer program has been explained, and the organization structure is clear, you may think you don't have anything left to ask anyone. Wrong. When you get the standard "What can I tell you about our firm" questions, you should never reply with "I know everything I need to know." Go into all interviews with some ideas of what you want to know more about and be prepared with intelligent, articulate questions.

In order to make recommendations to a hiring committee, an interviewer must gather facts. It is up to you to provide the interviewer with information they want. Answer their questions and elaborate. Yes/no responses seldom are enough. If an interviewer asks you a closed-ended question, convert it to an open-ended one. Remember - your resume is only an outline of your background, achievements, experiences, etc. Interviewers can overlook key items on the resume which you believe to be significant. Do not hesitate to elaborate on items already listed on your resume. Highlight those experiences you believe to be particularly noteworthy. Speak up. No rule says you can only speak when spoken to in an interview.

Twenty or thirty minutes is a very brief amount of time. There will be candidates ahead of and behind you. The more an interviewer learns about you by way of your questions, as well as your answers to his/her questions, the easier it will be for him/her to remember you out of countless others when s/he returns to the office.

STRESS INTERVIEWS

The idea of the stress interview is to throw you off balance and reveal the "real" you rather than someone who has the answers rehearsed. Interviewers in a stress interview are usually experienced and well organized with tightly structured procedures.

One stress interview technique is to set you up for a fall. You may be having a nice conversation with one or several easy questions that will be followed by a series of hard hitting questions that will leave you at a loss. They are trying to simulate the

unexpected or tense events of everyday business life. How you react to simulated pressures will give them an idea of how you will react to real life situations. The interviewer will talk very little with very few comments or editorializing. You get no hint whatsoever of how you are doing.

You never know when a stress interview will take place. The most intimidating stress interviewers are easy to spot. There will be no greeting, no eye contact, silence, no small talk, and a general air of disinterest or boredom. Sometimes questions will be fired at you in quick succession, not giving you a chance to answer one question completely before another is asked. If this happens, stop talking and listen to the next question. You do not want to be talking when another question is being asked.

Just remember that in a stress interview the interviewer has nothing against you personally. They just want to find out whether or not you can take the heat. Stay calm; no one can intimidate you without your permission.

BOARD INTERVIEW

This interview is set up where there is one student and several interviewers in the same room. How you handle yourself in a board interview does not differ greatly from the normal interview. The major difference is that since there is more than one interviewer involved, you can't concentrate on establishing a rapport with one person. The best way to handle this situation is to concentrate on the person who is asking you a particular question. Maintain eye contact with that person as you answer, occasionally glancing at the other interviewers. Remember to relax and maintain your confidence.

SALARY NEGOTIATION

With most of the larger firms and government, salaries are pretty much set. However, with medium and smaller firms, corporations and some public interest organizations, there may be room to negotiate. The major thing to remember here is that you don't want to sell yourself cheap and you don't want to overprice yourself either.

Sit down and honestly figure out what salary you will need in order for you to get by. That is to pay all your debts and still have money left to live on. Once you have

determined this, then you will need to get some kind of idea what the type of employer you are looking at is paying. The Office of Law Career Strategies keeps statistics that can help you. Never give a single salary requirement. Always give a range within which lies the ideal salary for you. Remember that other fringe benefits can play an important part in salary negotiations. There are several publications that get into more detail on salary negotiations in the Career Resource Center.

It is important to distinguish between arrangements you are making on your own as a result of a letter writing campaign you have done and the callback (or flybacks, as they are sometimes called), which is an organization's invitation to you to travel to the firm and meet additional members. The mechanics of arranging these interview trips can be burdensome to the point of not bothering with it at all.

If you have decided to work in a location where you are not going to school or live, it will be necessary for you to get there for interviews. It is the policy of most law firms not to pay expenses for student initiated interviews. The same is true for most government agencies and corporations. In a few instances, if an employer is sufficiently impressed with you, they might offer later to cover your expenses. This is not the norm and should not be anticipated. Likewise, it is not appropriate for you to ask the employer to do so.

Since you will be spending your own hard earned money for the trip, it must be well planned and thought out and your time used efficiently. You want to cover as much ground as possible without spreading yourself too thin. It is advisable to schedule interviews with two or three firms per day. Scheduling more than that means you run the chance of interview overlap; having to excuse yourself from an interview early (inevitably the one firm in which you are really interested) in order to keep another scheduled appointment. Should you find yourself with extra time on your hands because interviews are shorter than expected, you can always call on firms you've contacted previously, mention that you are in the area and would like to meet with someone from the firm. It is surprising sometimes how employers will react to "the man on the street" situation. You want to maximize your time away from school, but you also want to be effective. How realistic is it for you to be sharp and alert if you have been scurrying from one firm to the next? Do yourself a favor and use common sense when you are making your plans out of town. You will be better off in the long run to have made a favorable impression at a few firms than to have appeared harried and tired at a lot of firms. Focus on quality interviewing.

If a firm or other organization offers to pay expenses for a second interview, slightly different rules apply. Most employers going to the expense of bringing you to

their city expect to make the most of your time. Plan on spending a full day including lunch and possibly even dinner with members of the firm.

Most employers call and make invitations by telephone. Remember the name of the person doing the inviting and the invitation date. Confirm in writing if the scheduling permits. If no one mentions expenses (which happens if you are dealing with a busy lawyer), don't be shy about asking. Employers typically pay for round trip coach air fare, any ground transportation, lodging and meals. Students are expected to pick up incidental expenses and any lodging which is over and above what is necessary. In general, no law firm is going to nickel and dime about expenses, but they don't expect to be taken advantage of, either. In most cases a recruiting coordinator or a member of their staff will handle all of the arrangements for your visit. Feel free to ask questions and do ask questions if you have them. It is their job to make your trip a pleasant, productive one. They expect and are accustomed to questions regarding reimbursement of expenses. Avoid asking secretaries or other associates these questions. More than likely you will end up with guesses and the wrong information.

Splitting travel expenses is an issue which arises when you receive an invitation to interview with more than one out-of-town employer, particularly in the same locale. Most firms in the same location expect to share your expenses if they agree in advance to pay for your trip. When it comes to collecting reimbursement from prospective employers (charge cards such as American Express, Visa, and Master Card are handy to have while traveling), you will send receipts to the one employer who provided the most arrangements (be sure to keep copies of these receipts - "just in case"). They reimburse you directly and will settle accounts with others you visited. Don't forget to send a list of the firms. Although not all firms require receipts, keep them and assume they should be turned in along with a cover letter which explains your expenses. Ask at the firm whether they use the NALP standard travel form. Be sure to include your name and address on the expense sheet to speed along your reimbursement. It is permissible to interview with other firms in town who are not paying for your trip so long as you interview in good faith with those actually paying for your visit and you do not charge them for any more than their share.

Generally when seeking permanent employment (as opposed to summer employment), firms will pay travel expenses for spouses to travel with you and investigate the area you are considering moving to. Some firms will make arrangements for a spouse to be entertained while you are interviewing. It is a good chance for one family member to check out housing, schools, culture, transportation; all of which will be important factors in your final decision. Most organizations do have specific policies regarding husbands and wives working together. If you are a two-attorney family, you will need to bear this in mind. As a result of the increase of

women graduating from law school and consequent rise in professional couples, firms usually are willing to make every effort to do what they can for the spouse of the student in which they are particularly interested. Keep in mind that policies do differ among firms and therefore clarify these policies before your visit. Feel free to ask, but do not think poorly of a firm if they will not pay for a spouse.