INTERVIEWING SPECTACULARLY... FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE DESK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Presentation Slides

2. Interview Tips for Lateral Associates
   Vivia Chen

3. Interview Tricks You Should Know
   Vivia Chen

4. Selected Q&A’s from Kathy Morris
Interviewing Spectacularly...  
From Both Sides of the Desk

September 12, 2014 | 1:00 PM Eastern

Faculty Bios

**Peter Kalis** is the Chair and Global Managing Partner of K&L Gates. He continues to practice law, interviews all the firm’s lateral partner hires, and is on the inaugural list of the National Law Journal’s top fifty legal business trailblazers and pioneers.

A Rhodes Scholar and former US Supreme Court Clerk, Peter received his Doctor of Philosophy from Oxford, his JD from Yale, and his BA from West Virginia University. He is known as an influential innovator and a very funny, delightfully opinionated leader.

**Vivia Chen** is the Chief Blogger for The Careerist, and an American Law Media Senior Reporter. She is a member of the ABA Hall of Fame for law blogs; The Careerist has been honored not only as an ABA Top 100 Blog, but also by the Business Insider as one of the 15 most influential legal blogs.

A former corporate lawyer, Vivia received her JD from NYU and her BA from Williams College. She writes prolifically and engagingly about the ways lawyers shape their careers and manage their lives.
Moderator Bio

Kathy Morris is the moderator of the American Bar Association’s monthly Career Advice Series. A former criminal defense attorney, she has taught law, pioneered professional development initiatives in law firms, and in 2000, launched the original Career Resource Center of the ABA. She counsels law students, lawyers, law schools, and law firms through her longstanding practice Under Advisement, Ltd., www.underadvisement.com.

Kathy is also the creator of “The Legal Profession PREP Class,” an initiative designed to draw law schools and practicing lawyers into dialogue on the skills needed by graduates for more effective practice readiness.

She received her JD from Northeastern in Boston and her BA with honors from the University of Michigan.

Program Agenda

- Top Issues
- Tips on the Topic
- Participant Questions
- Agree/Disagree
- More Participant Questions
- Takeaways
- ABA Resources
Top Issues

• What to look for in interviewees and potential employers.

• Questions to ask, beyond the traditional inquiries.

• Ways to answer even the tough questions.

Tips on the Topic

• Watch interviewees’ body language for clues.

• Stress team activities.

• Be creative about the questions you ask.

• Always try to make a strong first impression.
Questions?

Agree/Disagree

Authenticity is critical on both sides of the desk.
Agree/Disagree

For an interview, choose the stories that show you to be the hero.

More Participant Questions?
Takeaway

• Interview like a good journalist: do your homework, deliver, and delve.

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• Never go on automatic pilot or take an interview for granted.

Final Takeaway

• Interview like a good journalist: do your homework, deliver, and delve.

• Size each other up...then give each other a real chance.

• Never go on automatic pilot or take an interview for granted.

• Assess and improve your interviewing skills...from both sides of the desk.
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Putting Social Media to Work for You

October 10, 2014
1:00 to 2:00 PM ET
Interview Tips for Lateral Associates

Vivia Chen

June 20, 2011

The good news is that firms are on the hunt for lateral associates--at least that's what hiring partners are telling me.

But don't kid yourself--it's still a buyer's market, so if you're trying to switch jobs, this is not the time to make blunders in the interview process.

Now that you know about proper etiquette for the interview lunch, let's focus on the interview itself. The Wall Street Journal's FINS (a career site for the financial sector) offers a refresher on the seven most frequently asked questions. Let's see how those questions play out in the legal profession:

1: "So, tell me a little about yourself."

FINS advises against talking about "anything remotely related to your place of birth, experiences in grade school, or your bad relationship with your parents." I'd agree with the parent stuff, but I think you should use what you can to set yourself apart from the crowd. So talk about your childhood in Hawaii and Indonesia. But if your background is a bit more prosaic--say, Ohio or New Jersey--I'd fast-forward to your more recent accomplishments.

But "don't get [too] personal or delve into items that suggest weird personal details," advises recruiter Barbara Mayden, a former associate at Skadden Arps and White & Case.

Prepare for the open-ended questions, adds legal recruiter Dan Binstock: "Some associates will just start rambling on for quite a long time and use this rope to hang themselves."

2: "Why do you want to leave your current job?"

The real question is: How much should you reveal about why you want out of your current job? Some obvious but often overlooked advice: Don't bad-mouth your firm--or that lunatic boss who's driving you batty.

But for the law firm, the question has a different subtext, says Binstock. The firm is wondering whether you are leaving "on your own accord or have you been asked to leave? . . . Are we landing a star or inheriting another firm’s problem?" Binstock advises candidates to communicate that they are in good standing. "Of course, the trick is not to appear too contrived, defensive, or arrogant."

3. "What are your biggest strengths and weaknesses?"
I have a hard time answering this type of question with a straight face, but I'd advise you to handle it with earnestness and modesty.

It's key to identify a weakness, but also how you overcame it, Gorman told FINS. Moreover, try to avoid clichés, like "I work too hard."

4. "How would your current or former colleagues describe you?"

This is a bit like the previous question--a trap for the braggart or the overly modest.

Try not to describe yourself as "the only employee who did things right," or "a great guy to hang out with after work," said Lynne Sarikas, director of the MBA career center at Northeastern University's College of Business Administration, to FINS.

At the same time though, don't underplay your impact. The better response is to describe how peers look to you for certain skills and qualities, writes FINS: "Your subordinates, for example, might say you're fair, and are always looking to pass along useful knowledge and opportunities to gain experience."

5. What is your goal for the short term?

Find out what your interviewer means by "short term," advises FINS. Historically, firms love to ask what you see yourself doing in five years.

The correct answer used to be that you see yourself as a partner in that time--but who has those lofty aspirations these days? Much better to put the emphasis on achieving "skill sets"--which has become the polite way of saying, "I'll work hard, learn something, and move on."

6. Are there certain tasks or types of people you don't like?

Search consultant Steven Raz told FINS that candidates should "steer clear of any answer that is abrasive to authority figures."

At the same time, though, many firms pride themselves on being civil and cooperative these days. So I think it's perfectly fine (and flattering to the firm's self-image) to say that you'd like to work in a collegial environment.

7. Do you have any questions?

"If there's a question that's a guaranteed game-changer, it's this one," writes FINS. "Coming up blank is a good way to show that you aren't thoughtful or interested in the job."
Legal recruiter Mayden also warns candidates not to ask questions indiscriminately. Contrary to what your teachers told you, Mayden says there are indeed stupid questions. For instance, don't ask about information that's readily available on the Web site, she advises.

And what else you shouldn't say? Mayden advises steering away from issues that suggest you're leaving for work/life balance reasons--unless you're interviewing for a non-partner-track position. Another no-no, says Mayden, is for law clerks to ask: "How long do I have to stay [here] before I can keep my entire clerkship bonus?"

Readers, what questions do you get hit with during the interview?

Do you have topics you'd like to discuss or tips to share? E-mail The Careerist's chief blogger, Vivía Chen, at VChen@alm.com.
Interview Tricks You Should Know

Vivia Chen

August 1, 2013

The on-campus interview season is about to start, and you are probably feeling very anxious. What will those firms ask you? What should you ask them? Will they figure out that you are a total fraud and have absolutely no useful skill to offer?

No worries. We've got you covered.

We've combed through our stockpile of Careerist's tips and picked the best ones. Here's everything you need to know about mastering the interview:

1. Best overall advice:

"How to Nail the On-Campus Interview"—Guest blogger Grover Cleveland, the author of *Swimming Lessons for Baby Sharks*, offers advice about demeanor, questions to ask, message points, and other essentials.

"How to Ace the Callback"—Assuming you pass the preliminaries, Cleveland has additional tips on how to close the deal on a summer or first-year associate job.

2. Best advice for those who like to be uber-prepared:

"Screening Recruits the Goldman Way"—The super elite investment bank gives aspiring masters of the universe specific tips on how to prepare for its grueling interviews. If law students prepare the Goldman way, they can probably ace any interview.

3. Best advice on handling "behavioral" or "competence" interviews." Sadly, some firms are trying to conduct more "substantive" interviews—ones that test whether you have the right psychological make-up or skill set to be a lawyer. If you're face with these types of interviews, you must know how they work:

"McKenna Long's Recruiting Couch"—Q&A with the firm's head of recruiting about the behavior interview. (Related post: "The Careerist goes on the Couch"—A first hand account of what it's like to take the psych test.)

"Getting Tough and Testy"—Pepper Hamilton now conducts interactive interviews where you're expected to defend your writing sample and analyze a hypothetical fact pattern. (Related post: Q&A with Pepper's hiring partner).

4. Best advice for those who have nothing to lose (e.g., your grades are lousy):
"Interview Tips that You Won't Get from Your Careering Counseling Office"—Unconventional ways to make an impression and sell yourself as the right candidate (even when you're not).

Do you have topics you'd like to discuss or tips to share? E-mail The Careerist's chief blogger, Vivia Chen, at VChen@alm.com.
A: Are there common mistakes people make in interviews?

Q: Aside from the obvious ones like being late, calling the person the wrong name, having your phone ring, using inappropriate language, or talking out of turn about your current job or boss, there are some other oft-made mistakes to avoid.

The number one reason people don’t get hired is a lack of enthusiasm. You may want the job, but so do others, and one differentiating factor is how you show or express your interest. Another misstep is being negative throughout the interview, even saying that the required tasks would be “no problem” rather than something positive, such as “I am comfortable with everything you need me to do and welcome the opportunity.” And, instead of focusing on what the new job could do for your skill building, emphasize what you could do for the employer to further their goals or enhance their client service. Small shifts in your interviewing mindset can yield the desired results.

Q: What do lawyers think is the hardest interview question to answer?

A: Oddly to me, most lawyers hate an interviewer’s invitation to “Tell me about yourself.” I say oddly, because as practiced as we are in introducing others, or in describing our clients, lawyers might turn to jelly or rattle on without strategy, when asked, in an open-ended way, about themselves.

This is an interview opener you can anticipate. Identify two or three main points you want to make about yourself to ground the conversation from the start. Keep your conversational response short though not curt, and set a tone as well as impart facts.

For example: I chose a career in litigation not knowing how satisfying it would be to help clients seek redress in areas of such import to them…and have spent the
last X years enhancing my ability to write, advocate for, and stand by them throughout many types of cases. At this juncture, I want to work with you—on behalf of your clients—because you concentrate in ____ litigation, which I especially enjoy and have decided to focus in on.

At this point, stop talking, cede the floor to the interviewer, and listen intently for the next question, knowing you have helped kick off the conversation well, having “[told] something about yourself” that was responsive, cogent, and compelling.

**Q: How can you discuss your background effectively at an interview without coming across as boastful?**

**A:** It always helps to be humble and human while you advocate as to your accomplishments. For example: “It really means a lot to me that I had the chance to argue in the appellate court and to see my work for the client pay off in a victory. It was also fun to make new law on a cutting edge issue” -OR- “I’m really proud that both the firms in which I’ve worked have given me great evaluations…and I’m pleased to have been able to put such a strong foundation under my career.”

Your question is a good one, because it’s important to find the line, when interviewing, between underwhelming the interviewer and seeming self-absorbed. Set your intentions firmly in your mind as you enter the interview room; that hopefully will keep you focused and grounded, and help you get the offer.

**Q: If an interviewer asks me who was the worst boss I ever had, and why, can I be honest?**

**A:** Yes, of course—you always want to blend truth and advocacy in job interview responses…but by the same token, you don’t want to get drawn into being perceived as disloyal or critical. So, this question can be answered directly, without naming names or going on at length. For example, you might respond (if true):

“One of my prior supervisors was great at giving feedback, but not as skillful in giving assignments. Thankfully, he had a good memory, so when he was critical of me for what he first thought was my missing an issue or going in a certain direction, I learned how to repeat that part of the assignment to him, without
being argumentative, and he would simply nod his understanding. Still, the process resulted in more fees for the client or his having to write off some of the time, so I also learned to repeat the assignment back to him at the time he gave it, which tended to crystallize the assignment at the outset.

This sample answer shows you to be forthcoming, to be someone who sees the practice of law through the lenses of the client and the business, plus someone who is a practical problem solver. As such, you would have turned a potential land mine into a positive interchange. Like a litigator in court or a transactional lawyer negotiating a deal, think quickly before speaking in an interview without appearing hesitant or conveying a conflicting message.

Interviewing is an art—learn to paint the picture people will see in your responses, with realism and skill.

Q: Can a person show too much personality at an interview?

A: Yes. Although it is important to be personable, and even to use a little well-placed humor, you don’t want to hog the floor or overwhelm the interviewer with a continuously loud laugh or too much energy. Most lawyers are actually introverts, but if you’re an extrovert with a huge personality, think about reeling it in for the first time meeting someone for an interview. Show your personality advisedly and appropriately and you can’t go wrong. Good question.

Q: Is there a relationship between interviewing well and being a good lawyer?

A: In many cases yes. If you can think quickly and artfully tailor your response to a question, delivering information confidently, clearly, and cogently, you have skills needed for interviewing and practicing.

However, in practice you also need to be efficient with your time and collaborative as well as competitive. Some great interviewees turn out not to be team players or have the work ethic it takes to excel in a service role. So while there is a relationship between interviewing and practicing law, the differences are what makes it hard to be right 100% of the time in hiring.

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