THE INTERVIEW

While the purpose of your cover letter and resume is to get an interview, the goal of the interview is to both evaluate the employer in terms of fit, and get a job offer if you believe the fit is there. Preparation is key to turning an interview into a job offer. Yes, some positions may be real stretches — you may not have the exact experience the employer is seeking — but when you are a clear match for the position, preparing ahead of time can make all the difference.

How to Prepare

First, research the organization. If you are interviewing with a particular practice group at a law firm, read the bios of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting, information about the practice, the office in which you will be interviewing, and the firm in general. Web sites such as www.law.com and www.vault.com can also be useful for both law firms and companies. Printed materials such as The Insider’s Guide to Law Firms add information not readily available from an employer’s site. Smaller law firms that do not have websites often have printed material describing their practice.

Your preparation should include researching YOU and ensuring that you can convey your relevant skills and experience in a way that is concise, intelligent, and articulate. Why are you leaving your current employer? What is your relevant experience for this position? What would your value be to this organization? What are your strengths? What areas are in need of development? What questions about you would you prefer not to get? For example, what was said in your last evaluation? If we called your current employer, what things would he or she tell me that you need to work on? If you don’t prepare for these questions, you will get them. It’s Murphy’s Law of Interviewing! To do thorough preparation in this area, see Typical Lateral Interview Questions on the following pages.

A good interview is a conversation between two people, which means you will be asking questions of your interviewers, as well—and it is expected that you will ask questions! Doing so demonstrates interest in both the firm and the position. Questions will of course come up in the natural flow of dialogue during the interview. However, you may have specific questions in advance that you would like answered as a way of more thoroughly evaluating the employer and position. See Sample Questions to Ask for examples of questions you may want on your list. We’ve also included Interview Dos and Don’ts and an Interview Tracking Form.
TYPICAL LATERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preparing for the Interview

In helping you prepare for interviews, we have categorized potential (and often asked!) interview questions under a number of “What If” headings. The “What Ifs” describe the type of information that the hiring team wants to gather from candidates. Several questions are listed below as examples of ways in which interviewers will gather the specific information. Underlined questions have been asked of our candidates recently.

“WHAT IF” they want to learn why you are job searching?

“Tell me about yourself.”

“What led to your decision to look for a new job?”

“Were you asked to leave?”

“What are your salary requirements?”

“Why have you changed jobs so many times?”

“How long have you been looking?”

“Do the attorneys you work with know that you are looking?”

“If I spoke with the attorneys who have worked with you, what might they tell me about your work?”

“Describe the comments made at your last evaluation” (strengths, areas for improvement)

“How would you say your assignments compared with those of other associates in the group?”

“How many hours did you bill last month [last year]?”

“WHAT IF” they want to learn more about the depth and breadth of your skills?

“What types of matters/deals are/were you working on right now/when you left?”

“What is your role on this particular project?”

“Describe the kind of matters you were working on last year.”

“What percentage of your work has involved [specific practice area] issues?”

“Have you had opportunities for client contact in any meaningful way?”

“What is the greatest level of responsibility you have had the chance to assume on a case?”
“WHAT IF” they want to learn more about your attitude toward work, supervision, and your career?

“What was your most interesting assignment?”

“Give me an example of the way in which you approach a complex assignment.”

“When are you happiest at work and when are you the least happy?”

“How and when do you feel a sense of achievement from the work you do?”

“Describe your relationship with the supervisory attorneys in your group.”

“Give me an example of a difficult supervisor [or situation] and describe how you handled the situation.”

“How would you describe your supervisory approach to working with more junior attorneys?”

“What is your least favorite part of your work?”

“WHAT IF” they want to identify your approach to professional development?

“What are your long term career goals?”

“What have you identified as developmental objectives for the next year?”

“If I spoke with your supervisor what would he/she say your weaknesses are? What do you think your weaknesses are?”

“What one thing could you do that would most improve your overall effectiveness?”

“Describe a particularly challenging assignment and how you accomplished it.”

“WHAT IF” they want to learn whether or not you have a strategic career plan?

“What specifically interests you about our company/firm/practice group?”

“Out of all the firms you considered last time, what tipped the scale in favor of [name of current employer]?”

“What kinds of skills have you developed in your current job? Which skills do you hope to develop?”

“What should we know about you that’s not on your resume?”

“Where do you see yourself in the next 2-5 years?”
SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

• How would you describe the culture of the organization?
• How would you describe the work environment here?
• What makes this company unique?
• What is the firm looking for in an ideal candidate?
• How many associates/attorneys does the organization plan to hire?
• How do you integrate laterals into the organization?
• What activities are attorneys involved in outside of work?
• How does the company support: professional development? Pro Bono? Political activities? Continuing legal education?
• What are some of the cases attorneys are currently working on?
• What work could I expect to be assigned?
• How much emphasis is placed on business development?
• What is the firm’s/organization’s system of management?
• How is work assigned, supervised and evaluated?
• How are new attorneys trained?
• What are the criteria for advancement?
• How many partners typically are named each year?
• On what basis is partnership determined?
• What about compensation, benefits, bonuses, raises?
• Why did you decide to join this organization?
• What is a typical day like for you?
• What do you like about the organization? What would you like to change about it?
INTERVIEW DOS AND DON’TS

Preliminaries

Review your research on the organization

Be sure you can articulate your career goals and reasons for wanting this job

Some Things To Expect

Interviewers who talk too much

Long, painful interviews

Inept, rude, unprepared, or bored interviewers

Interviewers who believe in a “stress” interview

Prepared, excited, and perceptive interviewers

To be interrupted often during the interview

To be allowed to take control of the interview

Some Dos

Review your research on the firm and interviewer(s)

Articulate your career goals and interest in the position/company

Be on time

Dress appropriately - wear a suit unless the organization indicates otherwise

Let interviewer handle first few minutes

Be sure you understand the question before responding and respond only to the question posed

Be responsive and alert

Be prepared with a resume and writing samples

Take advantage of opportunity questions (“Tell me something about you”) to sell yourself

Use positive terms such as “challenge” and “opportunity”

Some Don’ts

Avoid short, curt answers that work against keeping the conversation going

Avoid using negative terms such as “problem” or “disappointed”

Don’t be self-effacing or overly modest—I only…or I was just…or I am fairly articulate

Don’t whine about past mistakes, criticize a previous employer or use the interview to “unload”

Be aware of and control nervous mannerisms (hair twirling, sweaty palms, pencil tapping, etc.)

Don’t say anything you can’t back up

Don’t say you don’t have any questions about the company!
### INTERVIEW TRACKING

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