

SOME TIPS ON INTERVIEWING WITH LEGAL EMPLOYERS

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I. SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS

A. An interviewer wants to know if

1. you seem bright and articulate
2. he likes you
3. you have reasonably good interpersonal skills

B. An interviewer will generally like you if you're

1. self-assured
2. interested in him

C. You'll appear self-assured if you've prepared by determining

1. the sort of job you want
2. your strengths (abilities, interests, experience)
3. how your strengths qualify you for the job you want
4. your weaknesses (e.g., low grades, no summer offer)
5. how your weaknesses can be stated most positively if you're asked about them

D. You'll appear interested if you've prepared by

1. reading the employer's resume
2. determining that he appears to offer a job you want
3. deciding what more you want to know about him
4. developing questions to ask if time/circumstances permit

E. Your interpersonal skills relate more to your interviewing "style" than to the substance of what is said.

1. The best "style" is one that encourages a dialogue rather than a question-and-answer session.
 - a. Don't feel like you have to say or ask certain things.
 - b. You should not, however, hesitate to say or ask what's on your mind.
 - c. Be candid and straightforward when answering questions.
 - d. Be prepared, however, to respond to potentially troublesome questions in a positive way.
 - e. Try to engage the interviewer in conversation -- interrupt him if he's droning on.
 - f. Don't be overly deferential.

2. Keep in mind that the interviewer might be looking for
 - a. a firm handshake
 - b. good eye contact
 - c. neat dress
- F. Don't get down on yourself if you don't succeed at first.
 1. Anxiety begets poor interviews.
 2. Not every employer will like you, no matter who you are.
 3. You won't like every employer and that will often show.
 4. It takes only one offer from someone you like.
 5. Most offers to students with average or below average grades come in the second half of the interviewing season.
- G. Come talk to Mr. Hopson or Mrs. Love if you're having any problems -- no matter how trivial they might seem to you -- with interviewing.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. What the interviewer is looking for. An interviewer is seeking to determine -- beyond assuring himself that you possess some modicum of brightness and articulateness -- whether he likes you and whether he feels you have the interpersonal skills to interact easily with his colleagues and with his clients.
- B. "Likeability". You will be most "likeable" to an interviewer if you come across as being self-assured and truly interested in the job being offered. In this connection, it is fair to say that your interviewing "style" is more important than the substance of what you say.
 1. Self-assurance will result from being prepared for the interview, both by assessing your job preferences and the skills or areas of interest you have that make you suitable for the job you prefer, and by assessing the job being offered by the interviewing employer, which can be accomplished by reading the employer's "firm resume".
 2. Once you've completed your self-assessment and an assessment of the interviewing employer, and have determined that the employer appears to be offering a job that fits your preferences and skills or interests, then you will

be truly interested in that job and will come across that way during the interview.

3. You will enhance an employer's impression of your self-assurance and interest in the job during an interview by making comments or asking questions that bear upon your interests and abilities ("my participation in college debating has heightened my interest in trial litigation") and that show you have perused the employer's resume ("I particularly like the fact that your firm appears to give responsibility for all phases of litigation to newly hired attorneys."). Indeed, since an interview is a means for both you and the interviewer to obtain information about each other, there will be certain things you will virtually always want to ask an employer ("How long does it take to make partner?"). It is important, however, to try to "go with the flow" of the interview as orchestrated by the interviewer and not to prevent the interview from "happening" naturally and spontaneously by trying to insert too many prepared questions or rehearsed answers. This notion of the importance of your interviewing "style" will be discussed in greater detail below.

C. Interpersonal skills. An interviewing employer's assessment of your ability to interact easily with his colleagues and clients depends more on your "style" during the interview -- i.e., on your demonstration of interpersonal skills than it does on the answers you give, the comments you make, or the questions you ask.

1. There are no questions you "should" ask an employer during an interview. When, however, your assessment of yourself and the employer has made you truly interested in a job, there will be questions you will want to ask and will naturally ask. And asking questions that you want to ask will affect positively your self-assurance during the interview. Such questions might relate to the areas of an employer's practice, intra-firm personnel policies, or the quality of life in the firm's locale. Don't be afraid to ask whatever is on your mind -- subject, of course, to broad guidelines of good taste.

2. Just as there are no parameters within which all questions likely to be posed by an interviewing employer will fall, there are no answers which you "should" give to an employer's questions. There are likely to be, however, questions that you will be asked that are problematical for you, e.g., questions about grades or about your lack of an offer from your summer employer. In such cases you should be prepared to give answers that will turn a potentially negative fact about you into a positive one. For example, you might respond that "while it's true that my overall grades are not as good as I might have hoped, you'll notice

that I did very well in my tax courses, which as you know are my special area of interest." Or, regarding the non-extension of an offer from a summer employer: "Yes, it's true that I didn't get an offer from Smith and Jones, but it had nothing whatsoever to do with the quality of my work. Rather, I think that the members of the firm sensed that I didn't feel I fit in there and felt that an offer to me would be inappropriate. I encourage you to contact Mr. Brown at Smith and Jones if you want an assessment of the quality of my work." Remember, if there's a question that could be asked you that is potentially troublesome -- about prior jobs, grades, lack of honors and awards, etc. -- try to anticipate them so you can be prepared to answer them in a way that's most favorable to you.

3. As to interviewing "style" generally, the most important rule is to be yourself and be candid and straight-forward when making comments, asking questions, or giving answers. You want above all to be judged by an interviewer on the basis of what you are rather than what you can be. If you are so judged, you are likely to get offers from employers that like the real you, and not get offers from employers that don't like the real you, which is as it should be. Interviewing is not a "game" that must be "won" every time. Everyone's not going to like you -- that's the way life is -- and you want to be sure that those who do like you haven't based their decision on a false perception of you. If they have, you might well find in a couple of years (or during a summer) that they don't really like you (or you them).

4. You should treat an interview more as a dialogue than as a question-and-answer session. Don't be overly deferential toward the interviewer -- he was, after all, a law student himself not so long ago -- and try to engage him or let him engage you in conversation about something you're both interested in (it might be Charlottesville or softball). To that end don't hesitate to comment, to ask questions, or otherwise to interrupt the interviewer when you feel that an interview is overly one-sided, or when the interviewer lapses into droning on about the cases he/she's handling. Interrupting in such circumstances -- to comment, for example, on your legal interests and skills vis-a-vis the interviewer's -- will speak to your assertiveness (interviewers tend to like interviewees who are assertive -- or even aggressive -- without being overbearing) and to your self-assuredness as well as improving the "style" of the interview. You've nothing to lose and everything to gain by short-circuiting a one-sided interview with an employer you like.

5. While many articles on interviewing extol the virtues of a firm handshake, good eye contact, and neat dress, these alone will not guarantee success. One should, however, keep them in mind, if only because the interviewer might be looking for them.

- D. Preserve your sanity. Don't get down on yourself simply because you thought an interview (or many interviews) went well yet you didn't get a call-back. This happens to everyone. By all means, schedule an appointment to see Mr. Hopson or Mrs. Love if you're getting the "interviewing blues." It helps to talk to someone who's been through the interviewing season many times before.