

## Research

Research the company, law firm or agency you are interviewing with and the interviewer or interviewers you will meet. You can call your contact a few days before the interview to learn the names of the attorneys you will meet. Skimming the firm brochure five minutes before the interview is NOT sufficient. If the interviewer concludes that you know little about the firm/company, s/he is likely to dismiss you because of your apparent lack of interest.

The Resource Center in the Career Services Office has many reference materials that will be helpful to you, including reference files on many local law firms and corporations, the NALP Employer Directory, and public interest and government agency directories. The Internet is also an ideal place to research prospective employers. Every federal agency has a home page, as do many law firms and corporations. Seek out recent newspaper and magazine articles about the employers as well. Ask the Consultants in the Career Services Office, other students, faculty and alumni what they know about the firm. Consider calling the firm to get their marketing brochure in advance of the interview. Also, research the employer on Lexis and Westlaw. Other websites with useful information include martindale.com, vault.com and findlaw.com.

The research you do will better prepare you to converse comfortably with your interviewer and to articulate intelligent, thoughtful questions about the firm and the practice opportunities it offers. Do *not* feel compelled, however, to work into your interview every bit of information you have uncovered. You may come across as a know-it-all, a show-off or obsequious to the point of annoyance. Use your research, but use it judiciously.

## Key Elements to Prepare for the Interview

1. **List of Accomplishments:** After carefully reviewing the employer's information, make a list of accomplishments and job skills that make you attractive to this particular employer.
  - a. Evaluate your strengths and make a list of specific examples that will illustrate your value to the employer. (See the chapter on Resumes for a list of skills.) Don't limit yourself to past legal job experiences. Most skills developed in non-legal jobs, as well as volunteer work, are transferable to the legal profession. You must, however, be able to articulate your qualifications thoroughly. It is not sufficient to say you are a hard worker; give a specific example - i.e., when you put in extra hours to complete a project by a deadline. If you are a team player, emphasize the time you pitched in and completed a co-worker's project when she was hospitalized unexpectedly.
  - b. One area frequently overlooked by law students is an employer's need to generate new business. If you haven't done so already, create a notebook for networking contacts (see the Networking Worksheet in the Networking chapter). If you have one already, review the entries in the notebook. If it is well organized and neat, consider bringing it with you to the interview. It represents your initial efforts to expand your connections in the legal world which is a key step in future business development. Some of the most successful rainmakers in private law firms keep notebooks listing every contact they have ever made. Demonstrate your ability and willingness to develop this critical part of practicing law in a private firm.
2. **Plan Your Agenda:** Develop an agenda and practice your points
  - a. Prepare a five-point agenda before you go to the interview, highlighting key points about yourself that you want the interviewer to remember. Your agenda might include: 1) that you are an excellent writer (give specifics, i.e. your high grade in Lawyering Process, the writing award you won, the winning brief you authored last summer, the article you wrote that was published), 2) a foreign language skill (if relevant to the employer), 3) the marathon you ran last year (which demonstrates

drive and discipline), 4) your ability to work with little supervision (give a specific example from past work experience), and 5) the fact that you are committed to living in that city (family ties, previous work experiences in that city, etc.).

3. **Your Resume:** Know your resume *cold* and be prepared to answer questions about any item on it.
  - a. Be prepared to talk in depth on legal issues you researched in previous positions.
  - b. Evaluate your resume for weaknesses and gaps. Be prepared to deal with these issues. Avoid lengthy conversations about any weaknesses or negative job experiences. Put a positive spin on everything in your past and never badmouth a previous employer. Be ready for questions like "Why didn't you get an offer from the firm you worked for last summer?" or "Why didn't you work last summer?" If your grades are not the best, be prepared to deal with this issue in the interview. Acknowledge the issue but try to put a positive spin on the situation. For example, if this is the case, you could say, "My grades aren't as high as I expected given my high achievement in college but my GPA has gone up each semester."
  
4. **Prepare Answers to Common Questions Before the Interview:** Consider how you would respond to the following frequently asked questions by writing down answers to each one:

- a. **Personal (Attitudes, Attributes)**

How would you describe yourself?

Why do you think you will succeed as a lawyer?

Why should we hire you?

Is there any reason why we shouldn't hire you?

What is the greatest obstacle you've faced in your life?

What did you learn from dealing with this obstacle?

When are you available to begin working?

What do you consider your greatest strengths?

What are your weaknesses? (Be candid and acknowledge a weakness but "spin" it into a positive by demonstrating how you are working on that weakness).

Use three words to describe yourself.

What are you looking for in a firm/corporation/nonprofit?

Do you prefer to work independently or with supervision?

Do you work well under pressure?

Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time.

How did you handle it? What was the result?

How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.

What has been your experience in giving presentations? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?

What do you like to do for fun?

How do you maintain a well-rounded life?

What community or extra-curricular activities have you found rewarding?

Why should we select you for this position over the other applicants?

Are you more energized by working with data or by collaborating with others?

How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Describe a time when you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across to someone.

Give me an example of one of your successful accomplishments.

Do you have the qualifications and personal characteristics necessary for success as a lawyer?

What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?

What quality or attribute will most contribute to your career success?

What motivates you to put forth your best effort?

Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

Describe a situation where you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Describe a situation when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

Describe how you feel and how you react when others pressure you for deadlines.

Describe how you feel about taking direction from others and having them monitor your work.

Describe the ideal way to change a situation not to your liking.

Tell me about a time you solved a problem in a creative way.

**b. Law School**

Why do you want to be a lawyer?

Why did you decide to go to law school?

Why did you choose the University of Denver?

What was your favorite class? Least favorite?

Who is your favorite professor? Why?

Should we be concerned about your grades/class rank?

Why didn't you pursue Law Review/Moot Court?

What activities did you participate in?

Are you involved in any activities outside of law school?

Do you find it hard to manage your time between law school and work?

Has law school prepared you for the practice of law?

Have your ideas about being a lawyer changed since you started law school?

What influenced you to choose this career?

Describe the type of professor that has created the most beneficial learning experience for you.

**c. Previous Jobs**

How would a previous employer describe you?

How did you get your last job?

What did you gain from that experience?

How do you function in a fast-paced work environment?

Describe the ideal supervisor/characteristics of a successful manager.

Describe the least effective supervisor.

What problems have you encountered in previous jobs?

Describe a time when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?

Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?

What is the most interesting job you've ever had?

What do you consider to be a positive work environment?

Have you ever worked with a difficult person? How did you handle the situation?

**d. Commitment**

Have you decided what city you would ultimately like to settle in?

Why did you sign up for an interview with us?

What do you know about our firm?

Who else are you interviewing with?

Why do you want to live in \_\_\_\_\_?  
To what extent would you be willing to travel?  
What practice area do you see yourself in?  
Are you interested in doing pro bono work?  
What are your salary expectations?  
What is more important to you, the job itself or the salary?  
Why do you want to work at this firm?

**e. Leadership**

What do you think makes a good leader? a good lawyer?  
Describe a situation where you assumed a leadership role.  
Tell me about someone you consider a good leader and why.  
Have you ever been in a situation where a good/bad leader caused success/failure?  
Describe your leadership attributes.

**f. Goals**

Where do you see yourself in 5, 10 or 20 years?  
What personal goals are you seeking through a legal career?  
What will it take to attain your goals and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?  
What do you think it takes to be successful as a lawyer?  
How do you determine or evaluate success for yourself?  
What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet these standards?  
If you weren't in law school, what would you be doing right now?  
What long-term satisfaction do you expect to obtain from a legal career?  
How do you expect to balance work and personal life?

**g. Ethics**

How do you feel about lawyers advertising or soliciting clients?  
Is there any type of work you would not feel comfortable doing at our firm?  
How do you think your ethical standards compare with others in your law school class?  
What do you consider to be the most difficult ethical challenge lawyers face?  
What would you do if an employer made a decision with which you strongly disagreed?

**h. Public Interest/Government Jobs**

How do you expect to manage your loan burden?  
Can you commit X years to this organization?  
Are you interviewing in the private sector?  
How committed are you to serving the poor?  
Are you fluent in X language?  
What hours to you expect to work here?  
What are your long term plans?

5. **Prepare Questions to Ask the Interviewer:** Come into the interview with questions that are appropriate for this stage in the interview process. (Your questions at an initial screening interview may differ from those asked at a second, "call-back" round of interviews.) Your questions should reflect your knowledge about the firm, although not be phrased in such a manner that you come across as a know-it-all or "show off." You should also communicate sincere interest in the interviewer's response to your questions. Remember, the interview is your opportunity to screen employers. While they size up your credentials, personality and potential, try to learn as much as you can about their work environments, management style

and business goals. You want to know whether this employer is a good fit for you. Will it offer you what you need to achieve your career goals at this point? Remember, enthusiasm is a characteristic you want to convey about yourself. Consider asking the following:

- What characteristics does it take to succeed in this firm?
  - Tell me how you picked firm XYZ for yourself?
  - How does each department of the firm acquire new lawyers?
  - How are new associates assigned to practice groups? Is there a rotation system?
  - How does each department develop new work?
  - At what point in an associate's career here are you expected to bring in clients?
  - Does the firm have any program in place where new attorneys are given training in how to develop new clients?
  - What is the culture like at this firm?
  - What kind of projects will I typically be working on?
  - What was the most satisfying project you worked on this year?
  - What do you like best about this firm?
  - How will my performance be evaluated?
  - Who will supervise my work?
  - How is work allocated to [employees in my position]?
  - What training opportunities are offered to [an employee in my position]?
  - Does the summer program have a mentor program?
  - How are assignments distributed during the summer?
  - Do summer associates/new associates rotate among departments?
  - What percentage of summer clerks is typically offered positions with the firm/organization/corporation?
  - How fast are you growing?
  - Are some areas of your practice growing more than others?
  - What are the criteria for advancement?
  - Are attorneys involved in outside activities (bar committees, pro bono work, charities)?
  - Does the firm have a pro bono policy? What is it?
  - Is there a formalized training program for new attorneys?
  - How soon does a new attorney have direct client contact?
  - How soon does a new attorney get experience in taking depositions/appearing in court?
  - How many years, on average, does it take to become a partner?
  - Describe a typical day for you.
  - How would you describe the firm/organization/company and the people who work here?
  - How is the firm/organization/company structured? Is there a management committee? Who is on that committee?
  - Do new associates participate in committees within the firm?
  - Is there a mentor program?
  - How are associates integrated into the firm?
- 6. Dress to Get the Job:** Your appearance is extremely important. Do not be tempted to dress in the more casual styles popular now. You want to convince the employer that you will be a good representative of the firm/organization/company. If you dress unprofessionally, the interviewer will assume that you will not look professional when you meet with clients or appear in court. You'll never go wrong if you dress conservatively.

Rules for Men: Good quality dark suit (navy, gray or black), white shirt, conservative tie, polished shoes. No strong cologne.

Rules for Women: Tasteful, solid color suit with skirt (dark colors are preferable), neat hairstyle, medium to low-heeled shoes, no sandals or open-toed shoes, flesh colored panty hose, toned-down make-up, no strong perfume, low key jewelry.

# **The Interview**

Keep in mind that the interview begins the moment the employer calls you to set up a time for the interview. Be polite and enthusiastic on the phone. Also, don't forget that you are still interviewing if you go to lunch with the employer. The employer will be observing your behavior under all circumstances.

- **Tips for Interview Day**
  - Be early.
  - Be nice to everyone, including support staff.
  - Be a courteous driver in parking lots, etc. You never know who you might see.
  - Bring extra copies of your resume, references, transcript, and writing samples.
  - Walk into the office with confidence and a friendly demeanor.
  - Use a firm handshake.
  
- **Tone**
  - Let the interviewer set the tone.
  - Make the most of the first few minutes of small talk. You want the interviewer to like you. Strive to make a connection with the interviewer.
  - Be professional. Remember, even though the interviewer may be close in age to you, this is not the time to let your guard down. Keep your comments professional. An answer to questions like “Tell me what you did for the year in between college and law school” should not be “Had a lot of fun!”
  - Be a good listener.
  - Remember to avoid one-word answers to questions. Let them be lead-ins to a conversational style.
  - Show enthusiasm.
  - Show respect.
  - Answer the question being asked directly. Don't hedge.
  - Thank him/her at the end, shake hands and ask, “Where do we go from here?”
  
- **Thank You Notes**
  - Remember to send thank you letters immediately. (See the chapter on Thank You Letters).