

EFFECTIVELY HANDLING CALLBACK INTERVIEWS



For many of us, interviews are the most daunting part of the employment process, and when the initial 20-30 minute screening interview goes well, you will typically be invited back to the employer's offices for half a day of interviews and maybe a meal.

When you receive an invitation for a call-back, pause for a moment and pat yourself on the back - you have cleared a significant hurdle. The number of students invited for call-backs varies from employer to employer, but typically employers will invite back 10-30% of those students on their initial interview schedule. Once you obtain the call-back, there is little question about your ability to do the work; employers are more frequently looking for 'fit' at this time in the process.

General Guidelines After You Receive the Call-back Invitation

Respond to the invitation and respond promptly. It is very unprofessional not to respond (don't be a part of the more than 7% of call-back recipients who neglect to respond annually). Realize that it is acceptable to decline a call-back invitation, and you can do so tactfully and diplomatically. It is also acceptable to change your mind after accepting the callback, but do so as soon as possible and apologetically. Circumstances and plans

change, and in fairness to the employer and other students, it doesn't serve anyone well to attend the call-back if you are no longer interested in the employer.

When setting up the call-back, maximize the amount of information you can obtain from the employer. Ask about 1) how long the meeting will be (explain that you just want to make your plans and arrangements appropriately; you're not in a hurry and are

happy to stay as long as necessary); 2) the name(s) of interviewer(s) (realizing that these may not be available until the night before or the morning of your interview, and even then there may be last minute substitutions); 3) expense reimbursement policies (while most private sector employers will pay for your reasonable travel and accommodation expenses, it is best to have this discussion up front rather than later in the process when such a question could be more awkward).

BE COURTEOUS to everyone from the very first phone call – all people in the process can provide feedback to the decision-makers, and your judgment will continue to be evaluated throughout.

If you are traveling outside the DC area for a call-back, now would be a good time to contact other employers in the same city where you have the call-back and see if they are interested in meeting with you while you are in town. Feel free to contact one of the counselors in the CDO if you want to discuss how to handle this strategically.

Preparing for a Call-back

Keeping in mind that a call-back is typically several 20-30 minute interviews strung together, you should prepare in a method similar to what you did for the initial interview, only a bit more in depth. Feel free to contact GW alums, alumni from your undergraduate school, or the attorney who initially interviewed you to get advice. Research interviewers and the employer using the Web, Lexis/Westlaw news and case files, summer employment surveys and firm resumes in the CDO Resource Library, and the like.

Make sure you know where you are going and that you allow yourself some extra travel time to get to the office 10-15 minutes early so that you can acclimate to the office and locate a restroom.

The Call-back Itself

A call back interview usually lasts half a day and may involve a meal, usually lunch. There are many permutations (e.g., dinner the night before, weekend day events, etc.), so try to be flexible to each employer's set-up. The number of interviewers also will vary, and you may meet with attorneys individually, in pairs, or in groups in a conference room. Don't let your guard down with junior attorneys or support staff; treat everyone cordially and professionally. No matter what associates say, stay focused with them. They can be tougher than partners. Use Mr./Ms. unless you are told otherwise.

The attorney who initially interviewed you or someone from the recruiting staff may meet and greet you, shepherd you through the day, and/or debrief you at the end of your interview. This person may or may not sit on the hiring committee, but will definitely have input for hiring decisions.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED:

Expect to be asked more of the same questions you fielded at your initial interview, but expect fewer regarding grades and academic performance, since at this point in the process you have most likely made the "grade cut." Expect more informal conversation in an attempt on the part of the employer to gauge your 'personability' quotient. You may be asked the same questions multiple times by different attorneys. Stay fresh and enthusiastic – even if it's the sixth time you've answered it; this is the only time that interviewer will hear your response. Be consistent in your responses—don't change your responses depending on who's interviewing you based on their practice areas. See the "Employment Interviews" handout on CDO's website for sample questions you may be asked.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK:

Don't worry about asking the same questions of multiple people, so long as the questions are not already answered in the employer's written materials. Good questions are those that 1) get people to give personal responses and /or 2) legitimately can be asked of more than one person. For example: What do you find most challenging/rewarding about your work? What skills are necessary to succeed here? What factors attracted you here? What distinguished the practice/work environment here from other employers? Are there new practice areas in development? Where do you see the firm/organization 5-10 years from now – growth, practice areas, technology?

If a meal is involved . . . Avoid alcohol and foods which might cause slurping, spilling or squirting. Be prepared for discussions involving things other than work. Read the paper the morning before your interview.

After the Call-back

Evaluate the atmosphere at the firm. Debrief yourself. Remember that the interview is a two-way street and is as much, if not more, for you than for the employer. Don't take notes during the interview, but jot down your impressions as soon as possible

after leaving the site. Were doors open? Were people on a first-name basis? How was the non-attorney staff treated? Was it bustling or quiet?

THANK YOU NOTES are essential after call-back interviews. There is no consensus on handwritten versus typewritten—err on the conservative side and type them on paper matching your resume. It is not advisable to write to everyone with whom you met. All of your correspondence will go to the same file. Pick 1-3 people and write different notes or write a joint note. Or you can write a note to the Recruiting Coordinator or the attorney who shepherded you through the day asking that he or she extend your thanks to the others with whom you interviewed. Your letter will be routed to them and then placed in your file. Finally, if you don't receive a response from the employer within the timeframe that they told you, wait an extra week, and then follow-up via e-mail or phone. If you have a change in your credentials after the call-back, by all means, share your good news with the potential employer by e-mail or phone.

And as always, please feel free to meet with one of the counselors in the CDO to discuss any questions you might have about the interview process.

Good luck!