

SKILLS AREA RESOURCE SERIES

EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

TYPES: Employment interviews take two forms—the screening interview and the call-back interview. In both cases there may be communication between just two parties or there may be several interviewers seeking information from one employment candidate.

SCREENING INTERVIEWS: Generally, screening interviews are part of a formal interviewing process and provide an employer with basic information concerning the applicant's suitability for a position. Employers use your resume to make the first cut and the screening interview to eliminate from further consideration those who do not meet the minimum qualifications. Screening interviews usually last 20-30 minutes and may be held near campus, at an employer's office or via phone. Based upon predetermined criteria, an interviewer seeks factual information supporting an individual's candidacy. Relevant background and indicators of future success are carefully measured and considered.

CALL-BACK INTERVIEWS: The call-back interview is characterized by more prolonged contact with the prospective employer, and an emphasis on "fit" rather than evaluation of minimum qualifications. Although most selection interviews involve one-on-one conversations, you may meet with several employer representatives, either simultaneously or in a series of individual meetings. Most call-back interviews take place at the prospective employer's office. This allows the applicant an opportunity to see the premises and to develop a sense of the environment. Depending on the style of the interviewer, call-back interviews may be comfortable conversations or stressful encounters.

INTERVIEW FALLACIES: Developing an effective interview style requires applicants to be aware of interview myths and to prepare for them appropriately. The following are prominent myths:

- The interviewer is prepared for the interview, is knowledgeable about the organization and has reviewed the applicant's resume.
- The interviewer controls the interview. (The interviewer controls only the format of the interview; the applicant controls the content.)
- Applicants cannot prepare for an interview - one cannot predict what the interviewer will ask. (Interviews are predictable; applicants can anticipate the types of questions most likely to be asked, and should prepare responses.)
- Knowledge and experience are the factors most critical to a positive employment decision. (Once applicants are seen to possess "minimum qualifications," the decision to hire is largely based on personality and "fit.")
- The only important part of an interview is the first five minutes. (Failure to impress an interviewer during the first five minutes should not cause an applicant to dismiss the interview as unsuccessful. The remaining 15 or 20 minutes should be used to gain the interviewer's support.)

- An applicant can accurately determine the status of his/her candidacy by assessing the dynamics of a given interview. (Although it is important for the applicant to assess/analyze the interview, one cannot accurately predict the result.)

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Before

- 1) **Prepare.** Preparation begins before the face-to-face meeting, and includes the applicant's recognition of his/her credentials and of the organization. Applicants should:
 - Consciously evaluate/assess credentials and be able to articulate these qualifications/skills
 - Evaluate the position and the organization in terms of personal interests and career direction
 - Know the organization, the position specifications, and the interviewer
 - Rehearse answers to predictable questions (especially sensitive questions or grueling lines of inquiry, including hypothetical situation questions)
- 2) **Appearance.** Professional dress is fundamental! Your appearance should be conservative and suit the nature of the position for which you are interviewing.
 - Appear neat, clean, and fresh
 - Keep accessories moderate and jewelry tasteful
 - Clean and brush hair into an attractive style
 - Fingernails should be manicured and hands unsoiled
- 3) **Relax.** Many people experience stress symptoms before, during, and after interviews including: sweaty hands, headaches and muscle tension, increased heart rate, anxiousness, sleeplessness, heartburn, irritability, extreme nervousness resulting in visible shaking, or stomach queasiness. These physical reactions to stress usually result from self-doubt, confronting the unknown, and allowing fear of failure or rejection to take control.
 - Manage stress by learning to relax, getting enough rest before the interview, and concentrating on positive thoughts. Take a walk before the interview to relieve excess energy and stress.
 - Thoroughly preparing for interviews will substantially reduce stress. Knowledge of the organization, interviewer, and position counteracts fear of the unknown. Have a sense of personal/professional abilities and career interests to advocate your candidacy with confidence. Become familiar with the interview location and allow ample travel time to arrive at the interview 10-15 minutes early.

During

- 1) **Rapport.** You must establish good rapport at the onset of the interview. This creates an atmosphere in which information is exchanged easily and freely, facilitates trust and promotes and sustains the interviewer's positive reaction to the applicant's personality and credentials. Establish rapport by:
 - Greeting the interviewer with a firm handshake, a welcoming smile, and a warm greeting
 - Maintaining a friendly, sincere demeanor
 - Using a conversational tone
 - Exhibiting enthusiasm
 - Practicing active listening (an occasional nod or comment)
 - Maintaining eye contact (without staring)
 - Engaging sparingly in small-talk.

Rapport is easily lost by having a "chip on your shoulder," by incorrectly addressing the interviewer (use Mr. or Ms.), by not engaging in eye contact, by communicating disinterest through slouching or fidgeting, and by totally consuming the conversation.

- 2) **Converse.** During the interview conversation, content is a two-way street. When responding to inquiries, you should:
 - Be relevant and brief; refrain from talking excessively
 - Answer all questions thoughtfully; pause to organize your thoughts before responding
 - Respond truthfully, consistently, and candidly
 - Lead the discussion to points of strength and avoid conversations about weaknesses and limitations
 - Show a direct relationship between applicant skills and employer needs
 - Find appropriate moments to interject information (especially if the interviewer is not allowing you ample opportunity to fully describe your credentials and value to the firm)
 - **NEVER** participate in a conversation degrading a previous employer
 - Respond tactfully yet firmly to offensive questions and report any offensive/illegal questions to the CDO
 - Maintain a serious, friendly, relaxed demeanor; do not joke or "clown around"
 - Keep the interview moving along by maintaining enthusiasm
 - Be prepared to answer questions preceded by **WHAT, WHY, HOW, TELL ME, DESCRIBE FOR ME, EXPLAIN, and COMPARE.**
- 3) **Ask questions.** Most interviewers allow limited time for applicant questions, which must be selected carefully to avoid broadcasting a lack of research or causing the interviewer to doubt the applicant's priorities. See **Questions to Ask Interviewers** below.
- 4) **Listen.** Listening and understanding answers to your questions are critical to your ability to evaluate a potential association with an organization or firm. Attentive listening allows an applicant to catch subtle differences, understand hidden meanings, and identify evaded subject areas. Active listening (nodding and making supportive verbal comments) maintains an atmosphere in which important information is easily shared and discussed.
- 5) **Observe.** Observe the interviewer's body language for insight into how you are being perceived / received. These visual clues must be digested immediately to constructively change interviewing techniques.
- 6) **Closing.** Typically, at the end of the interview, the interviewer requests a final remark from the applicant. You should make a positive statement supporting your credentials and interest in employment with the organization/firm. If the interviewer does not mention the probable next step in the hiring process, ask about it.

After

- 1) **Record.** Write down immediate impressions, notes describing the organization, the people, the position and its requirements, the environment, and the time frame in which hiring decisions are to be made. This information will be invaluable to your evaluation process.
- 2) **Follow-up.** Remember to send a thank you note within 24 hours of the interview. Thank you notes are not necessary after screening interviews arranged through the Fall Interview Program, but are essential after call-back interviews and interviews resulting from a direct write or resume collection.

EVALUATING A POSITION: Avoid being excessively influenced by: the halo effect (allowing one trait to positively offset serious concerns) and stereotyping (allowing a particular image to control your decision). No one can describe all characteristics which constitute the right employment opportunity for you. Consider the following factors when choosing an employer:

Position: potential for advancement, challenge / enjoyment, career flexibility, responsibility level, practice areas, amount of travel, variability of job, subordinates, supervisors, peers, level of interpersonal activity

Organization: goals, relative size, market share, diversification, reputation, clientele served

Industry: growth potential, size, stability, sensitivity to economic conditions

Geographic Area: housing, cultural, recreational, schools, population density, transportation facilities

Remuneration: salary/commission, potential raises, medical/life insurance benefits, Bar costs, moving expenses, educational assistance, training programs, pro bono opportunities

ESSENTIALS OF SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING:

- Have a positive attitude
- Be outwardly focused
- Prepare
- Maintain a conversational tone
- Be sincere and honest
- Talk!
- Be enthusiastic
- Think about what you want the employer to know
- Bring references, a writing sample, a copy of your transcript, and extra resumes

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

General

- Have you made a decision about the city where you ultimately wish to work? Why have you selected this city?
- Why did you accept an interview with us? What interests you most about our organization? What do you know about our firm/agency/company?
- How would you describe yourself? Tell me about yourself.
- What qualities do you have that will make you a successful lawyer? Why would someone with your personality traits and background be a good fit for our organization?
- What would you consider to be your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses? Why should I hire you?
- If I called your most recent employer, what three things would they most likely say about you?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Are the most significant? Why? What did you learn most from a particular experience (on resume)?
- What is the greatest obstacle that you have overcome in your life/career? What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make?

- With what other kinds of employers are you interviewing? Do you have any pending job offers? If so, where?
- Is there anything I should know about you that we have not covered? Is there anything about yourself you want to add?
- When are you available to begin working?
- Does your law school have journal publications? Why are you not a member of one of these?
- What do you like to do outside of law school?
- Do you plan to continue doing volunteer work once you finish law school and are working?
- How do you balance school work and your part-time job?
- What persuaded you to become a lawyer? Why did you decide to go to law school/to your particular law school?
- What areas of the law particularly interest you?
- What is your basic career objective?
- Where do you plan to be and what will you be doing five years after graduation? Ten years?
- In what kinds of permanent employment are you interested? What are you looking for in a summer job?
- How much significance do you think we should attach to your GPA and class rank? Please explain the grading system.
- Under what conditions do you work most effectively? (Do you prefer to work independently or with others? How do you respond to guidance and supervision?)
- How might you pursue continuing legal education after you have been admitted to the bar?
- How do you think the legal profession is viewed by the public?
- How do you feel about a lawyer's right to advertise and to solicit clients?
- What have you learned from participation on a publication or clinical program?
- If you graduated from law school, passed the bar, and had a year to do anything you wanted, what would you do?

Large/Medium Office

- What in particular interests you about our firm/organization?
- What part of our practice/mission is of special interest to you?
- What relevant educational/employment experience do you possess?
- Identify the personal qualities you possess that would make you successful with our firm.
- How are you prepared to devote yourself to the work of the firm?
- What practice specialties interest you? (Are you interested in doing pro bono work?)
- What type of work are you unwilling to do? What would you do if assigned work in that area?
- What can you tell us about your references?
- If we made you an offer, how soon would you be prepared to give us an answer?
- What are your salary expectations?
- What do you want to gain from working for a law firm?
- What are your expectations about the numbers of hours you'll be working at our firm/organization?

Small Office

- What ties do you have in this community?
- What is your understanding of how a small firm operates?
- How committed are you to working with a small firm? How hard are you prepared to work?

- How would our firm satisfy your interests? What specific aspect of our work would be congenial to you?
- If we hired you, at what salary do you expect to start?
- How much court work do you expect to do? Is that experience essential to you?
- Do you consider yourself an easy person with whom to get along? Explain.
- In what environments do you work most effectively and efficiently? (Do you feel comfortable with supervision or do you work best on your own?)
- How much responsibility are you prepared to assume right from the start? Explain.

Government

- Why are you interested in this government agency? Tell me what you know about this agency.
- Why do you want a career in government?
- What is the minimum time you are prepared to stay in the government's employ?
- What employment experience(s) qualify you for this job?
- What is your career plan?
- What are your feelings about government employees generally and the effectiveness of the bureaucracy?
- In what other government agencies are you interested? In what ways do you prefer this one over the others?
- What training do you have in administrative law?
- How much courtroom experience do you have?

Judicial Clerkships

- Explain your interest in trying to secure a clerkship.
- What are your particular interests in seeking a clerkship with me?
- Do you think a one-year term is long enough to make the job worthwhile? Explain.
- What are the particular aspects of a clerkship you would value?
- How far do you feel you have progressed in developing your writing skills?
- How valuable do you consider law review work in preparing you for a judicial clerkship?
- Have you looked into, and, if so, what have you discovered about the reputation of the judges to whom you are applying for a clerkship?
- What judges have you particularly admired because of style, substance, or ideology?
- How important to you are the political views of the judges?
- What do you think of merit selection in the federal and state judiciary? Do you know how it is supposed to work?
- Do you approve efforts to provide machinery to remove federal judges who are guilty of misbehavior? In your opinion, would it infringe upon the independence of the judiciary?
- Do you have an opinion regarding Chief Justice Burger's charge that a large portion of trial practitioners are incompetent?
- How conversant are you with significant current decisions of the United States Supreme Court? Do you read *U.S. Law Week*?
- Under what obligation is a judge to help a law clerk find another job at the end of the term?
- How can we improve the administration of justice?

Legal Services and Public Interest Groups

- How committed are you to service for the poor?
- What if any interest do you have in service to the public generally?
- What are your practice interests? (Are you interested in: domestic relations cases, rights of consumers, landlord and tenant problems, claim collections, civil rights, anti-discrimination actions, rights to municipal services, welfare problems, or housing?)
- How much experience have you had in your field of interest?
- How much experience have you had with environmental issues?
- Would you be prepared to accept employment away from this city?
- For how long a period would you be willing to commit yourself to work for this agency?
- How important to you is the matter of compensation?
- What do you see as the basic rewards for working for Legal Services or Public Interest law firms?

LL.M. Candidates

- Why did you decide to pursue an LL.M. degree?
- Tell me about your background in (career field) before you entered the GWU program? Did you feel prepared for the program?
- Did you interview during your third year in law school? With what types of employers did you interview? What kinds of offers did you receive?
- Describe your academic performance in law school (J.D.). Do you think your grades reflect your mastery of the material?
- You have done work in (career field). Do you want to pursue it in more depth? Why or why not?

Second Career

- After working for a few years, why did you decide to return to school?
- Tell me about your background/work experience. What did you gain from it? What does your experience allow you to bring to our firm/organization?
- Of which past experience are you most proud?
- Why are you leaving the military/your business? How will you deal with a new boss?

QUESTIONABLE/INSENSITIVE INQUIRIES: Be prepared to handle these questions that, although impermissible, are frequently asked. If you are asked an inappropriate question, handle the inquiry tactfully; do not answer questions that place you in an awkward position. For example, if you are a woman and an interviewer asks about your marital status/family plans, you may answer: "My husband fully supports my pursuit of a legal education and career. If, in the future, we decide to have a family, both of our careers will be taken into consideration." Please bring any inappropriate incidents to the CDO's attention. Examples of such inquiries are:

- Are you married? What does your spouse do?
- Do you have children? How old?
- Do you anticipate additions to your family and if so how soon? Who will take care of them?
- To what extent will the existence of your family interfere with your performing a normal work week?
- In emergency situations, which interests would take precedence, your office or your family?
- Have you/your spouse consulted a family planning service?
- Will the fact that you and your spouse both work create tensions in your family?

- If one of you had to give up work which one would do so?
- If the work of either of you required a transfer to another city, how would you work it out?

QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

General

- What type of work does s/he do?
- How long has the interviewer been with the firm/organization?
- What made him/her decide to join the firm/organization?
- Describe the firm and the people who work in it.
- What distinguishes the organization from others?
- Describe the organizational structure. How are policies determined? What is the pro bono work policy?

Associate Positions

- How does the firm/organization determine what type of work a beginning attorney is assigned? How is the work supervised? How are the evaluations of that work communicated to the new attorney?
- How is the entry level attorney trained? Are there formal training programs?
- Does the firm/organization require its attorneys to specialize? When and how does the decision to specialize occur?
- How soon does a beginning attorney have direct client contact?
- What are the criteria for advancement? To what extent is the development of new clients a prerequisite to advancement?
- In what departments has the firm experienced the greatest growth in the past five (or ten) years? What are the firm's expectations for future growth? How many new attorneys do they anticipate hiring?

Summer Associate Positions

- What kind of work are summer law clerks engaged in? Is there a rotation among departments? How is the choice of departments determined?
- What kind of supervision can a summer law clerk expect to receive? Is there an evaluation process? How is performance communicated to the clerk?
- What percentage of the persons participating in recent years' summer programs have become associated with the firm/organization?

DO NOT ASK:

- “How will I benefit?” questions, including work/billable hours, vacation time, maternity leave policy, benefits, and pro bono programs. Ask these questions **after** you receive an offer.
- Negative questions, including rumors about the firm, how the firm compares with others, or what employees dislike about the firm.
- Questions you could answer yourself through simple research.
- Questions answered during the interview. Pay attention and listen!