

## **Tips for Achieving Interview Success**

*By Wisnik Career Enterprises*

As the hiring market becomes increasingly more competitive, your interviewing skills need to as well. Although we left 2010 in better economic shape than how we entered it, the legal field is still feeling the repercussions of a shaken market. This means there are limited positions available and job seekers need to interview effectively and make an impressive professional presentation. Employers hire people to help them make money, save money, streamline procedures and solve problems. **Therefore, your primary objective in an interview is to demonstrate what you can do for the firm.**

You will need to be able to articulate your skills and experiences to the interviewer in a concise manner and convince your future employer that you would be a significant asset to their firm. The interview is your opportunity to **bring to life the facts in your resume with illustrative examples of what you could achieve in the position.**

Preparation is key. The more you know about the position and the firm, the more likely it becomes that the interview will go smoothly and the firm will be a good fit for long term employment. If the employer sees evidence of **commitment and preparation during the interview process**, they will feel confident that you are the type of person who will make the extra effort to add value and be a significant contributor when you are working for them.

In addition, "educated enthusiasm" proves to the interviewer that you are a committed candidate. You should show excitement about the job and what you can bring to the firm. Your focus in every interview needs to be on **what you would contribute if you joined their team and why you want to work with this firm.**

Landing a good job is not just about being qualified; it is about demonstrating how you are the right person for the position. Preparing your personal Interview Strategy will set you apart from other candidates. Consider the following tips for how to impress a firm with your credentials and professionalism.

### **Tips for Effective Interviewing at Every Step**

**Preparing for the Interview • Knowing Your Resume • Planning Your Trip to the Interview • At the Interview • Answering Questions • Asking Questions • Further Interviews • After the Interview • Receiving an Offer • Starting Off on the Right Foot • Question Sampler**

#### **1) Preparing for the Interview**

Research the firm, role and individual you will be meeting with. It is helpful to look at information on the firm as a whole as well as on those you will be interviewing and working with. Doing some legwork before your interview indicates that you will show the same proactive preparation after being hired.

- Research the firm:
  - Know their strengths, their strategy, how they position themselves in the marketplace, and what they value in employees
  - Know their competition
- Conduct online research
  - For marketing professionals: look at the firm's website and research their markets, their target clients, and bios of the interviewers
  - For legal recruiters: go to the firm's website for firm culture research as well as [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org) for information about the legal industry and trends
- Search for LinkedIn profiles and firm bios if you know the name of your interviewers

**KEY POINT** Walk into your interview being able to articulate key issues concerning the firm and the industry. Demonstrate your research of the firm with prepared questions.

## 2) Knowing Your Resume

Prepare your Interview Strategy by summarizing what you bring to this position. What about you and your experiences specifically make you a good fit for this firm? Assume there are other people equally qualified on paper and make yourself stand out.

- Bring extra copies of your up-to-date resume
- Be familiar with your resume (dates, experiences) and be able to explain any gaps
- Analyze all of your experiences and be able to articulate how the skills you gained are meaningful for this position

**KEY POINT** For each of your experiences, be prepared to concisely state what you did and learned that will be transferable to the position you are seeking.

## 3) Planning Your Trip to the Interview

How you present yourself at an interview is critical and demonstrates your respect for the hiring process and your interviewer. Arrive to your interview early and professionally dressed.

- Know the location of the firm and be familiar with your route there
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early to the building and allow extra time to go through security and get to the appropriate floor
- Wear something appropriate and professional that you feel confident in. If you are unsure, lean towards the conservative
  - Dark suits and jackets are always safe
- Dress professionally no matter how junior or senior you are or how casual the firm is

**KEY POINT** Be comfortable so you can be confident. Take care of the small details so that you will be able to focus on the interview.

#### **4) At the Interview**

Remain professional and positive at all times. Do not talk negatively about your past experiences, jobs or employers. A positive attitude about your previous work indicates a positive attitude about future work.

- Give a firm, confident handshake
- Make solid eye contact and smile, smile, smile!
- Be enthusiastic, energetic, and listen attentively
- Do not become overly casual no matter how comfortable you feel with the interviewer. Be friendly and build rapport, but maintain your professionalism
- Try to relate to your interviewers by mentioning any common ground or connection you have with the interviewer and/or the firm
- Do not be afraid to say you are interested in and excited about the position
  - If you want this job, act like it!

**KEY POINT** Be professional and let your energy and enthusiasm shine through.

#### **5) Answering Questions**

Know your background and prepare your answers beforehand. Do a practice Question and Answer session (see the end of this article) using specific examples from your experience and have someone give you feedback. Interview questions are not just about your answers but about the way you deliver them.

- Prepare a clear Interview Strategy with 3 key themes that you would like to leave behind that illustrate the value and contribution you bring to this position
- Think about what is important to this firm and tailor your answers specifically to the position
- Give the interviewer specific and detailed examples that illustrate your ability to succeed in the responsibilities described for the job
  - For example: “I am very detail-oriented. I always check my work twice and have someone else proofread it for me before giving it to my supervisor. I take the same care and time when working on reports, memos and projects.”
- Be prepared to show that you are knowledgeable about the position and the firm

**KEY POINT** Know yourself and have your own Interview Strategy. Focus on communicating specific experiences that will help them to visualize you in this position.

#### **6) Asking Questions**

Ask insightful questions that reflect your intelligence, knowledge of the firm and commitment to this field. Come to the interview with well thought-out questions already prepared. Examples can be found at the end of this article.

- Meaningful questions will express your interest and the research you have done on the firm
- Show that you are committed to this particular firm and position, not just finding a job

- This is your chance to find out if this position is right for you, so ask questions that provide you with information that is important to you

**KEY POINT** Insightful questions can be great selling points. They reflect that you are a thoughtful and thorough person who is interested in the particular firm and position.

### **7) Further Interviews**

Second, third, and final round interviews present more opportunities to meet other people in the firm who are a part of the hiring process and are therefore committed to your success. You will also know that many more people when you start your new position.

- Do not be afraid to repeat the same “Interview Strategy” to different people; do not assume they share information with each other
- If you are a finalist for the position, consider what you have learned from people you have met in the firm and present a 90-day plan for what you would do if offered the position

**KEY POINT** Remember that every interview counts. Keep communicating your Interview Strategy and your excitement about the position.

### **8) After the Interview**

Every step of the process presents an opportunity to differentiate yourself. Remember to maintain professional, educated enthusiasm after every interview.

- Traditionally, when a search firm is involved, there is no need for the applicant to send a thank you note. If, however, you felt a real connection with one of your interviewers and want to send a follow-up handwritten note or email:
  - Include 2-3 key points in your thank you note of what you can offer the firm and why the position is right for you
  - Mention anything you had wanted to express in the interview, but did not have a chance to
  - Make sure there are no typos or errors in your follow-up correspondence. Even a simple thank-you note is a reflection of your ability to do the job right!
- Bear in mind that communications about further interviews or offers will be through your recruiter

**KEY POINT** Any follow-up with the firm should be a reflection of your professionalism that is error-free and reiterates why you want to work with them and how you would add value.

### **9) Receiving an Offer**

Once you receive an offer, it is customary to make your decision within one week. However, if you know that this is the right position for you, you may accept on the spot.

- You can ask the firm for a formal "Offer Letter" outlining your salary, start date, benefits and any other relevant information

- Firms are going to request 2-3 references. Make sure that you think about who you want to use for your references and provide only ones who you know will give you a positive recommendation
  - Call your references and ask for their permission
- Make sure to contact and thank everyone who helped you get the job

**KEY POINT** Remain professional and thankful once you receive an offer and be prepared with any questions about the details of the position.

### **10) Starting Off On the Right Foot**

Making a great first impression is critical to long-term success with the firm. Regardless of the level of the position, you must understand the culture of the firm and how this firm conducts business.

- Take steps to ensure you can make a smooth transition into your role in the firm:
  - Introduce yourself to people in your department and firm to become familiar with your colleagues and the dynamics of the firm
  - Review the firm's literature and website before you begin to acquaint yourself with firm's culture and the objectives of your department
  - Listen to gain an understanding of what is valued and how things are accomplished within the firm

**KEY POINT** Make sure to be a great observer and meet as many people as you can. Be attentive to learn firm goals and understand how things are done within the firm.

Remember, your goal in an interview is to make a positive impression about how you can benefit the firm.

## **Sample Interview Questions**

### **Sample Questions Interviewers May Ask You**

- What interests you about this specific position/industry?
- How will your previous experiences help you to be successful in this position?
- What skills would you like to acquire in the next two years?
- What did you like best/worst about your past positions?
- Could you describe your ideal working environment?
- How would your previous (current) employer describe you?

### **Sample Questions to Ask Them**

- What are the main responsibilities for this position?
- What skills/attitude do you think somebody needs to have to be a success in this position?

- How is this department structured?
- What characteristics have you found that lead to being highly productive as a member of this team?
- How would you describe the culture of this firm?
- What is the next step in the interviewing process?

