



Interview Preparation for Lawyers

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INTERVIEWING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL ROLE

Love them, or more likely loathe them, interviews are unavoidable for most of us, but with the right preparation you can significantly increase your chances of getting the job. Below are various tips that have served lawyers well over the years. You won't need all of them but by preparing properly, you can go in confident and ready for anything they throw at you.

PREPARATION – ABOUT YOU

Read through your CV in detail in advance of the interview. Take time to think about each of your previous jobs, checking that the dates are right and giving careful thought to your 'reason for leaving'. There is no right or wrong but professional development and career progression are generally safe ground, whilst personality clashes and complaints about your current firm are dangerous. If in any doubt, talk it through with your recruitment consultant.

Taking your CV as a whole, pick out one or two examples each of:

- Obstacles or challenges that you had to overcome, and how you did it
- Difficult relationships you had to deal with, clients or colleagues, and how you handled it
- Going the extra mile for a client or for your colleagues
- Dealing with time pressure versus quality of work
- Showing flexibility and initiative, thinking on your feet
- Mistakes you have made and how you have rectified them
- Client facing successes, winning new clients or strengthening existing relationships

Give some thought to possible answers for:

- Strengths and weaknesses (or 'how would your friends describe you?')
- Failures and successes (think life not just work)
- Where you want to be in one, five or even ten years' time
- What do you do outside of the office?
- Why should we employ you? This is your 'elevator pitch' statement summarising what you can offer.
- How much do you want to earn?
- When could you start if offered the job?

Print off the details of the interview – when, where, who you are meeting well in advance and double check the dates. If you are delayed en route, call your consultant who will attempt to smooth things over for you. (One tip – if you are unable to predict whether you will be able to escape the office, think about making appointments for first thing in the morning rather than after work) Ensure that you have sufficient bandwidth for the call – if you are unsure, consider plugging in rather than using wireless, or holding the interview somewhere that does.

PREPARATION – ABOUT THEM

Go through the firm's website paying particular attention to the team relevant to you, profiles of the Partners you would work with, deals they have done, recent news/announcements, the careers section (they may sometimes describe the culture for example). Also know the basics – where are their offices, roughly how

many Partners/lawyers, history - have they merged, how do they market themselves, key practice areas outside of your area of interest, name of the Managing Partner and Senior Partner.

Search the firm's name in the www.thelawyer.com archives. If you have old copies of Legal Business, it is also worth checking for any articles about the firm in there.

Talk to your recruitment consultant about the firm. They should be able to give you good pointers on the vacancy, likely interview style, the culture of the firm, feedback from previous interviews, things to avoid etc.

Given what you now know about the firm, **consider how you might fit into what they do.** Look for synergies of course but it may also raise questions, which you can then explore in the interview.

HOW DOES AN INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEW DIFFER?

With an average recruitment and relocation taking six months, and tens of thousands of pounds, to complete, the need to get it right is paramount. **Firms recruiting internationally put as much emphasis on the 'soft side' of the move as they do on the professional fit.** They will know the traits of someone who is likely to take relocation in their stride and will be alive to the warning signals of someone viewing the move through rose-tinted glasses. It is impossible to anticipate every question but there are some common themes that arise time and again, including:

- **Have you done your basic research?** Where is it? How big is it? Look into cost of living, taxes, regulations. If you can have contacts in the region, now is the time for an informal chat; if not, check some of the ex-pat forums for a 'warts and all' take on life there.
- **Have you considered your family?** Is your partner in favour? What will they do? Do you need to be married in order to cohabit? Have you considered schooling?
- **What is attracting you to this international move?** Ideally this should be a mix of professional opportunity and lifestyle, either without the other has the potential to sound warning bells.
- **How long are you committed for?** Ideally you should keep this open ended as most international firms are looking to hire and relocate people for the long-term.
- **What do you do with your time off?** Make it relevant – there isn't a lot of skiing in Singapore or opera in the British Virgin Islands! If you are dedicated to a certain sport, can you play it there? The enthusiasm to get fully involved in life outside of the office goes down very well.
- **Be yourself.** Personality is always important but international roles tend to mean smaller teams which makes it vital that they feel they have 'got to know you'.

ON THE DAY

Remember the niceties – people generally don't hire people that they don't like so building a rapport is critical. Yes of course this means getting the handshake and introductions right, but beyond that, it also means trying as much as you can to relax, smile, make eye contact and be yourself. Preparation is vital as discussed above, but delivering pre-prepared answers in a robotic fashion is a sure-fire route to disaster.

Take your time over questions. If a question stumps you, don't get flustered – it may well be that the interviewer knows it's a difficult question and is asking it to see how you handle that type of situation. If you don't have an answer, think about whether you can change the question, for example:

"So, have you had any experience of investment funds work?" If the answer is no, don't panic!

You ideally want to avoid just saying no, and lying is out, so answer a different question...

“As you can see from my CV, I’m not an investment funds expert but I think I have shown throughout my career that I have the ability to adapt – when I was with firm x, for example, I was hired to handle mainstream corporate work but as the market changed found myself becoming a restructuring lawyer. I really enjoy the challenge and would welcome the chance to develop my funds experience.”

Don’t ramble but keep one-word answers to a minimum. Striking the right balance is key – if you have prepared well you will know your experience and strengths inside out so keep the answers on point, concise but elaborate enough for it to be a conversation not a series of consecutive questions.

Know your key selling points and make sure you get them in. This is particularly important in the more laid back, conversational interviews. It is easy to walk away from one of these chats having heard a great deal about them but not really said much about you. It is of course a failing in the interviewer but that is academic if you don’t get the job so make a mental (or if you like physical) note of the things that you are determined to tell them about you, and make sure you get it in, even if you take advantage of the ‘any questions’ at the end.

Any questions? By this stage there is every chance that all your questions have been answered. This is an ideal opportunity to turn the question back to the interviewer(s) and take a final chance to influence their opinion with something along the lines of:

“I think you’ve answered all of the questions I had in mind, thank you. Is there anything that I have said today that you would like me to expand upon or any answers that I have given which you would like me to clarify?”

At best you might get the opportunity to re-cover a point which may otherwise have been perceived as a weakness. At worst, it is a neat and polite way to wrap up the interview.

Get the job first and then worry about whether you want it. If you go into an interview half-hearted, chances are you won’t get it. Remember to finish the interview by expressing your interest in the role. Interviewers get a lift from knowing that they have done a good job of ‘selling you’ the opportunity and your enthusiasm is likely to count in your favour when decisions are made later.

OTHER RESOURCES

For more interview tips look at the resources page on our website where you will find articles on Interviewing for Senior Level Roles; Interviewing by Skype; Interviewing by Videoconference; and Interviewing by Telephone.

CONTACT

For more information on interview preparation or to discuss any aspect of your international job search, please get in touch with:

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