



Interview Preparation for Lawyers

Interviewing for a senior level role

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INTERVIEWING FOR PARTNERSHIP OR A SENIOR LEVEL ROLE

If this is your first time interviewing for Partnership or another senior level post you are likely to notice some significant differences, particularly if the last time you interviewed was as a relatively junior associate. Below we identify some of the key areas and provide some tips on how you might prepare.

THE BASICS

- **Review your CV** – know key dates, prepare to discuss perceived weaknesses, note the highlights.
- **Prepare for ‘standard interview’ questions** – most senior level meetings will be more akin to a business meeting than an interview but nonetheless it is worth being ready to discuss things such as:
 - Strengths & Weaknesses
 - Successes & Failures
 - Career ambitions
- **Research the firm** – Partner profiles, recent news (relevant hires, office openings), financial performance, growth strategy, any negative press. Use the website, legal press, sector specific press, LinkedIn for Partner backgrounds. Your recruiter may provide this information.
- **Know your elevator pitch** – a sales term that won’t sit comfortably with some lawyers, but it can be a highly effective tool. It is your three-minute answer to the question ‘why should we hire you?’ In reality, you are unlikely to be asked it but it can inform your whole approach and can also serve as a convincing way to wrap up a meeting, leaving them with a clear impression of why they should be offering you a position.
- **Know the details** – who you are meeting, where they are, how to get there, how long it will take.
- **In case of emergency** – if it’s unavoidable and you can’t make it, call your recruiter but in case they are not available, have a number handy for the firm or Partner you are meeting.

THE BUSINESS CASE

Most senior level meetings are highly conversational and far less structured than an Associate interview. This is positive but it also puts a great deal of emphasis on you to get your key points across and to sell yourself, since you are less likely to be fed questions to bring out your strengths. The meeting is also far more likely to focus on business than on technical expertise since by this stage in your career, the latter will likely be taken for granted.

As such, it is key that you consider your business case – think about your network of contacts, your business development experience, how you might envisage bringing some of your own work in:

- **If you have a following**, be prepared to discuss this in some detail – not necessarily naming specific clients but discussing the nature of the contacts, the potential fee income and the likelihood of them following.
- **If you don’t have a following or if you are in a field where followings are less likely** (such as litigation) you should pay even greater attention to how you would endeavour to bring in work. Think about contacts with whom you may be able to secure an opportunity to pitch, think about marketing and profile building opportunities and of course the potential opportunities to cross sell with your new partners.
- **Consider opportunities to introduce work from your contacts to your prospective Partners.** A transactional lawyer may bring opportunities to pitch clients for disputes, tax or employment work for example.

- **Be realistic but be confident** – nobody should encourage you to artificially inflate expectations and in any case a firm is likely to spot the danger signs. On the other hand, in our experience, lawyers are prone to underestimate their potential and err on the side of caution. It is of course important that the firm provides the right platform but assuming it does, you will need to be bold enough to convince them that you are a good financial bet. Few if any firms are hiring Partners for technical expertise alone nowadays, so if you want them to back you, you will need to back yourself.
- **Display a commercial understanding** – simply demonstrating that you ‘get’ the need to add to the firm commercially will serve you well. Some senior lawyers still slip into the trap of assuming their skills alone are sufficient but if a firm picks up this impression, the meeting will probably be quite short. Useful steps include talking about the ideas you would want to implement in your initial months with the firm, asking about marketing support and cross selling opportunities and discussing financial expectations.
- **Offer to produce a business plan** – leading on from the previous point, offering to provide a business plan at the appropriate stage (typically when there is genuine mutual interest) can be a very positive step. If they take you up on this, it is a chance to clinch the offer, and even if they don’t, it shows a commercial willingness.

CONCLUDING THE MEETING

- **Try to establish next steps** – what are the timeframes, how would the process advance, how many interviews would usually take place, is there paperwork to complete? One of the greatest problems with senior moves can be a slow pace of progress, so if it is possible to gently get some commitment to a timeframe for moving forwards that can help.
- **Is there anything else they need** – similar to the end of a client meeting, it can be useful to confirm that they have all of the information they need and/or ask if there is anything else you can provide in order to assist in the process.
- **Confirm your interest** – unless you are sure this is not for you it is worth taking the opportunity to state your interest in continuing discussions. Even Partners like to think they have done a good job in ‘selling’ their firm and evidence suggests that confirming your interest can significantly improve the impression that a prospective employer is left with.

OTHER RESOURCES

For more interview tips look at the resources page on our website where you will find articles on Interviewing for an International role; Interviewing by Videoconference; and Interviewing over the Telephone. We also have resources to assist senior level lawyers in preparing a business case and in calculating a following.

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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