

How To Excel in Law Firm Interviews

We have seen the same scenario repeated over and over again. We send a highly qualified candidate out on an interview, only to later learn that a job offer was never extended. What went wrong? The reasons for unproductive interviews vary from one candidate to another. Furthermore, interviews are often handled differently, depending on whether the interviewee is a paralegal, legal secretary, IT Administrator, or CFO candidate. Hiring organizations also pose questions about certain topics at different stages of the interviewing process. However, candidates need to be ready to answer every question, whether it's posed to them during the initial screening interview, the "call-back" interview or during a post-offer stage.

Let's review how even excellent candidates can suddenly find themselves in need of new jobs. Then we'll take a look at some helpful pointers that will greatly increase every candidate's chances of receiving a job offer for the right position at the most opportune moment.

You've Decided to Look Into Other Opportunities

Imagine the following scenario. You are a paralegal in a major Chicago law firm. You accepted the firm's offer just after graduating from college because the paralegals and lawyers who hired you said they would allow you to do public company work and offered you a great salary. You even sincerely liked the attorneys and other paralegals in the firm during the beginning of your time there (at least, most of the

time). You worked hard to learn how to be a good paralegal and you feel that you have succeeded. Today, you have discovered that your opportunities are limited. Your supervisors don't seem to be your friends anymore. You're certain that you haven't changed, so what's going on now?

It's probably not your fault. Law firm staff members are, for better or worse, at the mercy of the attorneys who are responsible for bringing in the work. In addition, your upward mobility is dependent on the structure of the firm, over which you have little control. For whatever reason, after evaluating your short- and long-term career goals, your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses, and your chances for personal and professional growth at your firm, you make the decision to look elsewhere. This is not an easy decision! In fact, it may be one that you agonize over for months before ever deciding to act.

What Happened? You Didn't Get an Offer Following Your Recent Interviews

You contacted a professional staffing firm. The staffing firm suggested that you send over your resume so they could submit it to several other "big name" Chicago law firms. The staffing firm then arranged a few interviews for you. You went to the interviews and thought you did well, even though none of the firms really matched your interests and goals. Maybe you received three "call-back" interviews, only to wind up without a single job offer.

You began to feel shocked, depressed, worthless and trapped. Will you have to remain with your current firm forever? Since there are many days when you can't even stand your job anymore, you begin to worry about what will happen if others in the firm discover your true thoughts and feelings about remaining there. Does this mean that you will never become a partner? Will they fire you? Should you leave the practice of law entirely? What about your student loans?

Coming from a top firm, you can't understand why you're encountering problems trying to land a new job. Your professional search consultants may have never worked in a top firm; they may not even know what it is like to work around lawyers. They have no idea what's going wrong either. Therefore, you decide to stick it out at your current firm and continue with your unhappy existence.

You may even find yourself wanting to join the Peace Corps or teach school. (Weren't those things you always wanted to do?) At other times, you start wondering if you'd like set up small business back in your small hometown outside of Rapid City. Maybe you should return to school and obtain an MBA degree. You've even started privately thinking, "Who cares about student loans and family?"

If all of this sounds a bit too hard to believe, think again. Candidates who fit profiles highly similar to the general one just described continue to approach us on a regular basis. What's important to remember is that you never need to ever let your own situation become so desperate. In fact, there are law firm staff members out

there who can truthfully tell you that they consistently get almost every job they try to land. What do these people know that you haven't learned yet?

Keep in mind that no one is saying that if you apply certain principles, you will get every job you seek. You must be realistic and recognize that every job interview involves various swing factors that you cannot anticipate or control. There are even hidden agendas involved with most interviews. For example, personal chemistry and other external factors may influence whether or not a given interview goes well for you. Many times, there is very little you can do to control these factors. However, there are things you can do to overcome even personal chemistry problems. Always remember that, like other employers, legal hiring organizations want to hire the very best person for the job.

Candidates who consistently follow all of the pointers set forth below, tend to get hired more often than other applicants.

1. Be Prepared

Candidates who prepare for interviews are much more likely than not to be hired. Preparation is the most important component of any interview. If you become one of our candidates, we will attempt to ensure that you are prepared for your interviews. We will provide you with starting salary and bonus structure information, facts about the people you will be speaking with, and insights into the events currently taking place inside the law hiring organization that are motivating the interviewers to consider hiring you. It will help you to look up recent articles about

the firm so that you can learn even more about it. Find out as much as you can about the organization's operations, market niche and corporate culture.

Be sure to review the following questions that may be posed to you during your interview. Your ability to answer these questions calmly and intelligently will indicate just how well you really have prepared yourself. Amazingly, many candidates fail to land the job they want because they cannot properly answer these rather simple questions.

Why Did You Decide to Interview for this Position? To give a meaningful answer to this question, you will need to know all about the different types of work the firm does and be able to clearly state why it is so attractive to you. You must be able to convincingly express why you're interested in working on such projects. If you already know people at the firm, you need to state that you've spoken with them and that you share their outlook (be sure you speak with your contacts before the interview). You should add that you understand the reasons why these other people find the firm so attractive. However, this question can involve a trap; so beware. The interviewer may be checking to see if you will begin criticizing your current organization. You should never do so in an aggressive manner. What you can do is discuss your need for different types of work, for increased responsibilities and challenges, and your desire to be part of a firm that is growing. You may add that you also want to be working for a firm that values all of your skills. Never badmouth your current firm or supervisors. If you do so, you will be viewed as indiscreet and disloyal.

What Do You Know About This Particular Legal Hiring Organization? The more detailed your answer is to this question, the better. Sharp employees are always well prepared. With the wide availability of information via the Internet, there is no excuse for not knowing some information about the firm. The higher in the organization your position would be, the more information you will be expected to know. For many of the top administrative positions, your knowledge of the firm and the market will need to be greater than that of many of the partners in the firm. A well-prepared answer cannot help but convey that you are good at what you do.

It is important to be prepared because the biggest trap attorneys can fall into during interview involves thinking they can "wing it" based upon the strength of their charms or resumes. While it's true that you may not get to share all of the answers you prepare for your interview, it is always wise to avoid being caught off guard.

When you have prepared for an interview, you will be able to enter into it in a more focused frame of mind. As you gather additional information, you will be gaining important knowledge about the hiring organization's practices and employees. While doing this initial work, you will be able to identify attributes in yourself which match those of the legal hiring organization. Employers want to hire people who they believe will fit in with their current staff and practices.

Since your level of preparation will likely determine how successful you are, be sure you start getting ready for each interview several days in advance. This added time would allow you to spend more time

thinking about the organization and what your role might be in it. Furthermore, when you fully prepare, you're more likely to pose intelligent questions to your interviewers. (More information will be provided later in this article about the types of questions you should ask.)

2. Understand Your Goal

There is one key goal you must focus on during each stage of the interviewing process. You need to make a positive impression. Never express concerns or doubts during an interview. There are probably plenty of candidates for the same position who will not express doubts during their interviews. Your goal is to get the job and you can only accomplish that if you make a positive impression. You made a positive impression back when you applied to law school and when you landed your current position. Try to remember how you managed to do that. Never forget how important it is to make a positive first impression. You will have numerous opportunities in life to make a bad impression. Resist the temptation to be lazy. Arrive fully prepared. Think about everything you're planning to say during an interview before you say it.

3. Know Your Strengths

We recommend that candidates try and make up a short list of approximately five of their strongest selling points related to each particular hiring organization. This list should reflect your most notable achievements so that it will help distinguish you from the other candidates for the job.

4. Understand the Importance of the Screening Interview

This interview's importance will depend upon whether or not you are a junior or senior associate.

If you are a Paralegal. Paralegals' reasons for wanting to move are usually quite similar. They usually want to get more or better experience. Paralegals are typically "screened" by the hiring organization before they are brought in for a "full round" of interviews. During this early phase, the interviewers are just trying to gather rather general information about each candidate.

The screening interviews conducted by law firms are usually handled by the chief paralegal of the firm or by the partner to whom the paralegal will be assigned. The types of questions this individual will most often ask have to do with the paralegal's work and responsibilities. It is important for the candidate to avoid asking numerous questions about such subjects as salary, vacation and benefits at this stage. The paralegal's job is simply to leave the hiring organization with the impression that he is hard working, dedicated to the practice of law, easy to get along with and mature. You must make a positive first impression at this stage. You want the firm to believe they can have confidence in you as an excellent advocate working on their behalf.

If you are a Legal Secretary. There are several types of secretarial roles within firms. Whether you are being interviewed to be a corporate or legal secretary, your interviewer is likely to have several questions about your ability to do the specific types of work required by the job. In most firms, you will be working for a given partner within the firm. One of the most crucial aspects of this interview will be the chemistry you have with this particular partner. Different partners have different types of demands regarding what they expect from their

secretaries-including staying late to help on important cases, calling them at home with their messages-you name it. As a legal secretary, it will be extremely important that your interviewer believe that you will do the work that they require. Dedication to your work is extremely important and the lawyers with whom you are working with will want to see that you have this.

If you are a Candidate for a Senior Administrator Position. Firms are very careful about interviewing senior administrators. They will spend a considerable amount of time just deciding whether to even interview you. Unlike paralegals and legal secretaries, the need for senior administrators is typically far more defined in a legal hiring organization. As a senior administrator interviewing for a position, you will need to convincingly sell your management skills and prior experience to the firm. You will need to appear well prepared, and if hired, ready to “hit the ground running.” Additionally, you must be ready for questions designed to determine if you will be able to fit easily into the firm’s social structure.

Firms expect senior administrators to ask a number of intelligent, probing questions during interviews. Be sure to ask questions about the individuals you will be working with and what your specific responsibilities will be so that you can determine if you will be comfortable working in the new firm’s environment.

Be sure you try and tactfully discover the reason for the availability of the position you are interviewing for, if you don’t already know it. It is important to find out who preceded

you in the position you are interviewing for and, if possible, why they left. You will also want to know whether there is any type of dispute surrounding your interest in the firm. It is common knowledge that firms are always a bit cautious about hiring senior administrators since they will often be hired after competitive bidding within the firm among the existing administrators for the position. Furthermore, new senior administrators have yet to be trained in the firm’s unique style.

If you are a Candidate for an Information Technology Position. If you are interviewing for an information technology position, you may already know the people who are interviewing you. Unless you are interviewing for the chief position within the information technology department, at the screening stage, the interviewer will have only one main concern: whether you have technical skills that will complement those of the team. You will likely be talking to either a technical person and you will need to demonstrate that you have useful skills. As a candidate for a high level IT position, on the other hand, you be able to demonstrate to a lawyer who is not a technical person that you understand the relevant IT issues well enough to describe them to someone who does not.

5. Show Enthusiasm No Matter What

The sad fact is that some of us simply go into interviews on bad days. Others get flustered at some point in their interviews or lose enthusiasm during the latter stages of the interviewing process. No matter what your situation, you need to realize that the people who most consistently land the jobs they want are resilient and able to put their best foot forward in all of their interviews.

One poor interview can engender a negative vote that will turn a potential offer into a rejection. You must remember to think of yourself as a highly skilled person during each of your interviews. You need to be “up” whenever they are dealing with clients of the firm or in the attorneys for whom you work. You need to be resilient and keep yourself in a positive state of mind throughout every stage of the interviewing process. You must also remain calm, even if you’re asked 10 separate times why you are deciding to move. Each time you answer this question, you need to respond with the same amount of enthusiasm that you displayed the first time the question was asked. Remember that every interviewer will be watching you closely; always assume that each one has a veto.

Enthusiasm and “being up” involves more than just indicating your desire to work for a particular employer. All legal organizations want a person with “spark” or something that sets them apart. The tendency of all of us is to be circumspect and cautious during interviews. Of course, there will always be that “threshold” cat-and-mouse moment after you first meet when you and your interviewers will attempt to “size up” each other. Was your handshake too firm, too soft or just right? Are you trying to avoid eye contact with your interviewers? Does your voice indicate that you’re experiencing stressful feelings? Do you appear meek and self-effacing or filled with self-confidence and the ability to take charge of situations? Are you too aggressive or passive? All of these questions are designed to shed some light on the subjective ways your interviewers will be evaluating you.

While no one can tell you how to act with each specific person, we can tell you this: You must exude serene self-confidence without appearing arrogant. Regardless of your age, your employer expects you to be able to talk with high-ranking partners or court officials under stress. When you project the right demeanor to the interviewer, you are indicating that you can do the job. If you miss the boat here, you stand a chance of flunking the interview and losing a great job.

You might be surprised to learn which basic mistakes you are making without even knowing it. Many of our most successful candidates have told us that they practice their interviewing skills. Some even put on the clothes they plan to wear to the interview before asking a loved one or good friend to sit down and ask them the most difficult interview questions they think might be posed to them. They then ask those who are role-playing with them to then be brutally frank about how they are presenting themselves. You don’t have to be a professional interviewer to spot flaws in another person’s interviewing style. Be sure you practice your interviewing techniques BEFORE you go to the real interview. Your accomplishments have gotten you in the door. The interview is the final barrier. Treat it with the importance it deserves.

6. Sell, Sell, and Sell!

While this adage could be incorporated into some of the material already presented above, we’ve decided that it’s so important that it needs to have its own section. You need to sell yourself. Many candidates for law firm positions act like they are

uncomfortable with selling. This always seems strange to us. Virtually every human being on this earth knows how to sell. You did some successful selling to land your current job. Before that, you sold yourself to your schools during the application process. To a great extent, you sell yourself every time you make a new personal friend. If you're involved in a serious personal relationship with a significant other, that means you managed to sell who you are to that person, too. What have you managed to do each of those times? You convinced the other person or organization that you deserve to be treated with respect and are a very worthwhile individual. Apart from self-esteem issues, it is difficult to understand why some people aren't able to "sell" themselves during interviews.

A failure to sell yourself during an interview can create many negative repercussions. Candidates who do not sell themselves run the risk of being seen as arrogant, cocky and disinterested. Such behavior also makes the candidates appear ignorant of the fact that many others may be competing for the same position. Always sell yourself. When you do this, you not only make yourself look better, you also make those in the hiring organization feel good about themselves since your behavior indicates that you want what they have to sell. If you were a law firm, would you want to hire the staff member who knew how to sell herself or the one who did not?

7. Look Your Best

You should be neat and clean and your hair should be nicely cut. Male interviewees should wear a suit, a tie without any stains on it, a clean and pressed shirt and shoes

that have been recently shined. Men need to be sure that they have recently shaved or carefully trimmed their beards. Women interviewees should also wear business suits. They must wear hose and carefully choose blouses that are appropriate for the workplace. Only shoes or pumps with modest-sized heels should be worn. Women also need to avoid overdoing their make-up. Both men and women should refrain from wearing cologne or perfume. It isn't necessary, and it can irritate interviewers who may have mild allergic responses to such substances.

While you aren't interviewing for a military position, you still need to remember that it's foolish to make either an emphatic or veiled counter-cultural statement with your clothing. More often than not, you'll be interviewing with firms whose clients are multinationals and their business generates billions of dollars. They demand that those working for them demonstrate integrity not only in their work but also in their appearance. This is because no one can escape the fact that people judge you on how you look. People tend to think (though often incorrectly) that if someone looks messy, their work will reflect the same carelessness. Therefore, before you go to an interview, look at yourself in the mirror. Be sure that you are as presentable as you can be. While your appearance itself won't get you the job, it can help you start out on the right foot.

Many legal professionals feel they look their best when they wear a certain suit or if they exercise the day before an interview. Whatever makes you feel that you look your best, you should do it. An interviewer's first

impression is influenced to a surprising degree by your physical appearance. It will affect how he or she views you and your ability to interact with clients.

8. Know Your Audience

The Peer Interview

As a general rule, persons who will be your peers or subordinates in law firms are looking for candidates who are primarily “likable.” For instance, they are interested in the type of candidate they could have lunch with. These people are not as interested in your qualifications as they are your personality. You need to impress these people. Let them see that you are a friendly, likable person. One of the biggest mistakes that interviewees make is trying to impress persons who would be their peers that they are extremely competitive workers. This can prove dangerous since it’s an approach that may imply that you think you’re a much better worker than the people who are interviewing you. While this may in fact be true, you must never let such an attitude surface during an interview with these people. If you were granted the interview, you’ve got the qualifications. Concentrate on making younger persons who would be your peers think of you as a friendly person and not as a competitor.

The Supervisor Interview

Remember, on the other hand, that supervisors are concerned with your ability to work hard to get the job done. It is when you are interviewing with these persons that you can take the opportunity to tell the law firm how talented you are and how hard you like to work. After all, these are the people who are most likely to make the final decision as to whether or not you should be hired. They are looking for hard

workers who have the capacity to help the attorneys who make up the firm. However, it will still be important to them to learn that your peer interviews went well. That information will naturally tell them that you are likable and that you probably get along well with others.

9. Realize That Law Firms Never Want to Hire “Losers”

The firm will decide whether or not it wants to hire you based almost exclusively on how well you do during your interviews. However, legal hiring organizations, especially law firms, never want to hire “losers.” Your job during any law interview is to convince the legal hiring organization that you are not a “loser.”

You can categorize interviewees in many ways. The following list of three basic types of candidates tends to match the three main types of lawyers. Those interviewing you will try to figure out which lawyer profile fits you. Members of almost any organization fall into one of three categories: “losers, cruisers and grinders.” Cruisers and grinders will get hired, while losers will be quickly forgotten.

The Loser Candidate

First, a law firm wants to make sure you’re not a loser. Law firms believe that a loser is a candidate who acts inappropriately during the interview or doesn’t appear to be truly interested in the job. Losers are also those who will be difficult to manage if hired and indicate to their interviewers that they have had significant problems with their supervisors in their current or past positions. Law firms also believe losers are those who do not have a strong interest in practicing law or are arrogant.

Firms are always reluctant to hire interviewees who indicate that they do not like to work hard. You may also appear to be a loser to a firm if you fail to look directly at each of your interviewers during different points of the interview. All of the traits just described tend to fit losers; these candidates rarely ever get hired. They generally make very poor employees and fail to thrive in a law firm environment.

The Cruiser Candidate

Cruisers represent about 30 to 40 percent of the people interviewed by law firms. A cruiser is the type of candidate who tends to do his work in a fairly competent manner. However, she never demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm for the work he or she is given. Furthermore, he never does anything to indicate that he is a truly outstanding lawyer who would like to make partner. At least he does not demonstrate a “fierce” drive to move ahead in the organization. Cruisers comprise the majority of people working in large law firms and, in fact, they are critical to a firm’s success. They often have truly exceptional backgrounds, good skills, and are capable of doing good work.

The Grinder Candidate

Grinders comprise the most sought after candidates. A grinder is a person who demonstrates a single-minded obsession with being the best performer possible. If the position is a billable position, they tend to bill the most hours, they try very hard to fit in well with everyone socially and they do very excellent work. While grinders desperately want to move to the next level or achieve the next reward within the organization, they manage to demonstrate their ambitious nature in

appropriate ways. In addition, these types of candidates may sometimes demonstrate certain weaknesses of temperament or management skill. However, they are usually able to be “malleable,” which helps them overcome their weaknesses. These types of candidates typically get the most offers.

Though there are some exceptions to the categorizations listed above, you can be sure that losers never get hired and grinders land all of the most desirable positions.

10. Ask the Right Questions During Your Interviews

If you have done enough research about the employer, you should be able to develop an excellent list of questions that you would like to ask. You need to make sure that you have questions ready for each of your interviewers once they ask if you have any questions. (This holds true even if you have to pose some of the same questions more than once to multiple interviewers.) Your failure to ask questions may sometimes be interpreted as a lack of interest on your part.

The questions you ask should be direct and relevant. You want your questions to go way beyond the standard types of questions that the other interviewees will be asking. Good questions will immediately provide you with relevant information. You will have the chance to evaluate the answers and their credibility by observing the interviewers’ voice tones and body language. Keep in mind that when you ask good questions, you distinguish yourself from the other interviewees. Furthermore, failing to ask certain questions may negatively affect how you are evaluated as a candidate.

Prepare a List of Questions Before the Interview

Before you go into any interview or series of interviews, you should prepare questions that you feel are direct and relevant. The process of doing this will help you prepare for the interviews and be in a “ready mode” when you arrive for them. You should ask questions about various aspects of the firm’s practice that truly interest you and are relevant to the job you may receive. However, do not be too prying. A good tactic is to ask questions about how the firm staffs cases.

Because the questions that are relevant will vary so much depending on the position you are seeking, we are not able to suggest specific questions here. Nevertheless, it will be important that the questions be ones that indicate you are attempting to determine how you can be most effective, not just how your duties can be minimized or your life made easier. Because your position, in one way or another, will be designed to support the work of the firm’s attorneys, it is important that you ask some questions that indicate your interest in the attorneys’ work. Some general questions can be suggested to you for further refinement:

1. How is a project typically staffed?
2. How many of the firm’s lawyers are in a particular department? (if your prior research did not answer this question)
3. Is the department subdivided? If so, how?
4. What different responsibilities would I have?
5. To what degree will I have autonomy in completing the work I am assigned?
6. In the transactional area, what types of deals do paralegals work on?
7. How will I get my work? Will my work be assigned from a department head, or will my work come from just one attorney?
8. Will I be assigned work from other departments?
9. Are assignments randomly to be given based on my availability or will my duties be standard?
10. Are there “cliques” within the firm which make getting work difficult?

You can come up with an almost endless list of questions to ask during an interview. Nevertheless, here are a few more that are considered acceptable inquiries.

1. How often will I be required to stay late? Will I have advance notice of this?
2. How much turnover of staff does the firm experience? How much attorney turnover?
3. How is the firm governed? Is there a small committee that makes all of the important decisions?
4. How are evaluations handled? How many people determine an employee’s progress and compensation?
5. What type of training does the firm do?
6. What are the firm’s overall growth prospects? What are they in your specific practice area?
7. Are partners accessible?
8. Do you have major overhaul plans in the area where I will work? (e.g., do you intend to change the library system completely to eliminate books and move attorneys to electronic research)?
9. What do the interviewers like most about the firm? What do they think needs to be changed?

Never ask about salary or benefits during an interview. In addition, never ask whether the firm frequently terminates attorneys or staff. It is your recruiter's job to obtain this information for you. It's quite possible that the firm may even voluntarily offer this information to you during the interview.

11. Do Not Act Nervous

You should practice interviewing in front of a mirror, with a friend or your spouse. Repeatedly in excessive nervousness. In the past we have seen candidates come for a series of interviews with law firms and not receive a single job offer. How could that happen? We learned that all of the candidates appeared far too nervous during their interviews. Sometimes, people completely leave behind their usual personalities when they go into interviews and become excessively nervous. Candidates typically leave interviews where they've appeared extremely nervous without even realizing how they came across to their interviewers. You need to ensure that you are not excessively nervous during your interviews. Try to avoid moving around or fidgeting constantly. Don't say, "You know" numerous times or laugh inappropriately. All of these behaviors reflect excessive nervousness.

You need to exude confidence during your interviews, but not appear cocky. Think of the kind of person you would want to hire if you were in the supervisor's position. You get the point. Let the interviewers see you demonstrate the same type of focus you usually project.

None of this is meant to say that just being a little nervous will harm your chances. In fact, the adrenaline that starts pumping

when you are nervous can actually help you excel in your interviews. Just try to stay aware of how you are really behaving and attempt to hide your nervousness as best you can. Arriving on time and well prepared can really help minimize your nervousness.

12. Prepare Honest, Positive Answers to Possible Interview Questions

There are certain cardinal rules that characterize what you should be doing during each interview. If you study the following list of some of these rules and the description of each one, you should be able to improve your interviewing skills.

Cardinal Rule 1: Never Bad Mouth Your Present Employer.

You should never bad mouth your present employer or boss. This mistake can make you appear both disloyal and unprofessional.

Cardinal Rule 2: Never Speak in Detail About your Current Firm's Cases.

Never reveal specific details about any of your current clients' cases. You need to come across as an employee who can be trusted and who views confidential matters seriously. Your interviewers want to know that you will protect the confidentiality of their clients' secrets.

Cardinal Rule 3: Be Honest

You must always be honest during your interviews. Don't let your enthusiasm for the job cause you to start making slight exaggerations. Never fail to reveal crucial information you're being asked to provide. Do not try to adeptly avoid a question about your past or present job experiences or academic performance. Always remember that no law firm expects

you to be “superhuman.” No employee is perfect. In fact, letting others know about some of your weaknesses can often make you appear more human and attractive to employers. People tend to reject those who try to portray themselves as perfect individuals.

Of course, work with attorneys may have trained you to highlight facts that paint a favorable picture without appearing insincere. You can do this on your own behalf, if you do not exaggerate anything or omit crucial facts.

Cardinal Rule 4: Never Reveal a “Sour Grapes” Attitude.

No matter what type of question you are being asked during an interview, you should never answer with a reply that reflects a “sour grapes” mentality. Each answer you give needs to be “upbeat” in some way. Think about this from your own experience. Do you prefer to be around people who are positive or negative? The same principle applies to interviewing. When you provide upbeat answers to the questions, you will come across as a positive person. Such responses also make the interviewers think that you are psychologically healthy. Your positive attitude can even help the people interviewing you feel at ease and good about themselves.

Cardinal Rule 5: Allow the Interviewers to Reach Their Own Conclusions.

The best interviewees allow those questioning them to reach their own conclusions about their overall qualifications and suitability for each position they pursue. You cannot force the person interviewing you to support you simply because you have well-prepared answers to their questions.

However, effective answers to interview questions can obviously help you educate the interviewers about why you are the best attorney for the position. Simply provide your answers in such an open and pleasing manner that your interviewers will all but forget the five other people they already interviewed for the same position earlier in the week.

Cardinal Rule 6: Evaluate Your Resume From Each Interviewer’s Perspective.

Before each interview, you should try and review your resume from the perspective of the particular hiring organization that will be interviewing you that day. Bare in mind that a resume makes a statement regarding both the information it provides and doesn’t provide. Your resume will be in front of every interviewer you meet and will guide their questioning of you. We review thousands of resumes a year. We learn quite a bit about all of these attorneys just from reviewing their resumes. You must learn to anticipate questions about what your resume says and what you (may have) intentionally omitted.

Cardinal Rule 7: Completely Review Your Own Background Before the Interview.

Given the importance of this point, it might have been best to list it first. You may be asked questions about your most challenging assignments, where you see yourself in five years, what your personal philosophies are and what type of work environment you like. A well-prepared interviewee knows him or herself and is prepared for whatever questions come their way. By knowing yourself, you reflect the type of confidence employers want to see. Nothing comes across worse to an

interviewer than a wishy-washy attorney who has no real idea who he is or why he is interviewing with a particular firm.

Cardinal Rule 8: Make Sure Your Answers are Short, Concise and to the Point.

A legal professional whose answers are long-winded and who thinks out loud cannot help but convey the message that she might behave that same way with a superior. Interviewers want short, clear and definite answers. Such responses tell the interviewers that the legal professional they are interviewing knows himself and is confident. Long-winded answers convey indecision and the inability to quickly provide appropriate responses.

Cardinal Rule 9: Know Your Audience.

The fact is that you may need to tailor your answers a bit in regards to the particular person who will be interviewing you. Most interviewees have a good sense for the different types of managers, peers, and attorneys that might interview them. While you never want your answers to sound too formal or too "loose," the fact is that an answer might impress one person in one way and another person in another way. Similarly, different types of candidates may have unique types of personalities. Stated differently, some personality types will simply be more receptive to certain types of answers.

Cardinal Rule 10: Never Allow Yourself to Become too Relaxed

No matter how comfortable you feel, or how relaxed the person interviewing you may seem, never get too relaxed with your answers. Never provide answers that reveal highly personal aspects of your private life.

Never present yourself as being too relaxed. If you find yourself interviewing with a firm that has no formal dress code, it will still be inappropriate for you to dress professionally for the interview. Becoming too relaxed, for one reason or another, may be taken as a sign of disrespect to the hiring organization. Many interviewees fall into this trap and lose positions because of it. Do not let this happen to you.

Remember, your job is to communicate that you are likable and a professional. You should not try to convey that you are the legal hiring organization's "buddy." You need to be perceived as a competent person who will do their work properly, get along with others and respond well to authority.

13. Be On Time

Too many good candidates lose great positions because they are late to interviews. While this is not an insurmountable problem, the fact that you've arrived late for an interview can make you unduly nervous. No one looks good if they are sweating during their first interview. You may even disrupt several interviewers' schedules. You will also have to justify your lateness during each interview. This may lower your self-confidence and cause you to not sell yourself as effectively as you might have if you had just arrived on time.

Plan to arrive at the building where the interview will be held at least 30 minutes before you have to be on the twenty-second floor for your interview. You can examine every magazine in the lobby newsstand and catch up on current events. You might even want to take a favorite magazine with you that you haven't had a chance to read yet.

You want to arrive on the appropriate floor approximately two minutes before your interview is scheduled to begin.

14. Let the Recruiting Meal Put You “Ahead of the Game”

If you are taken to a meal, the event is important! In fact, we have seen many highly qualified candidates fail to receive offers because they did not excel during this meal. Sometimes, candidates actually manage to make unusual errors during these meals. We honestly have no idea why so many interviewers like to meet with candidates in such settings. In many respects, we consider the interviewing meal to be overvalued. Nevertheless, it is important and candidates need to do well during it.

In business and legal circles, most people ask others to lunch in order to develop or maintain business relationships. How you behave in social situations can say a lot about you. While we could turn our suggestions about how you should behave during one of these meals into a book, we will choose instead to just provide you with some basic rules of behavior.

Cardinal Rule 1: Wait in the Lobby for Your Host. It is bad manners to take a seat at a table until your host has appeared. Since the legal profession is a very demanding and sometimes unpredictable one (due to phone calls, added filings and other issues), your host may often be late. Wait in the lobby. You should allow your host to walk with you to the table and not feel like they have inconvenienced you by being late.

Cardinal Rule 2: Eat at the Same Pace as Your Host. For example, if the person with

whom you are dining is a slow eater, you need to be sure that you do not finish long before they do.

Cardinal Rule 3: Order Only the Basics. Do not order an appetizer or a dessert unless your host does so first. Never order the most expensive thing on the menu. However, if the other participants in the meal order appetizers or desserts (or if your host suggests that you feel free to do so), go ahead.

Cardinal Rule 4: Determine the Appropriate Price Range by Asking Your Hosts What They are Planning to Order. This is the best way to learn if a specific menu item is too expensive.

Cardinal Rule 5: Treat Your Meal Servers With Respect. How you treat the server will say a lot about how you are likely to treat your peers and others within the legal hiring organization. Never be disrespectful to the servers.

These cardinal rules are not included here to simply remind you of Emily Post’s great wisdom. You need to remember these pointers. Should you actually be someone who needs to know how to hold your fork or where to put your napkin, you will need to do additional reading. Just remember that the interview lunch is a test of your social skills and grace. Some people take years to learn these skills.

Though you might be asked important questions during the meal, its main purpose is to test your ability to make small talk and get along with others. Do not let your guard down! Too many candidates forget this important warning. The interviewing meal

needs to be approached with the same level of enthusiasm and professionalism that you exhibit during the more formal interview stages.

15. Listen

Last, but not least, you need to LISTEN during your interviews. Though if you're nervous you might wish you could do all of the talking, be sure you listen carefully to what your interviewers are asking and saying. Keep in mind that many individuals like other people the most who allow them to talk about themselves. Many of the attorneys you will be interviewing with will really cherish the opportunity to talk about themselves and their accomplishments. Let them talk and try to appear truly interested in what they are sharing. This will make them feel good about themselves and appreciate your attentiveness.

Attorneys value people who know how important it is to be a good listener because they are expected to be good listeners themselves. Most people become attorneys so they can try and help solve other people's problems. You can't really help the attorneys in this endeavor until you have truly listened to them and gained some understanding of their problems. Candidates who do not care about their interviewers' opinions are rarely ever hired.

16. Remember That the Interview Isn't Completely Within Your Control

Regardless of how well you prepare, and no matter how well you fit a firm's ideal profile, an interview can still go poorly without really being anyone's fault. Personal chemistry is often the culprit.

It is our job at Law Firm Staff to eliminate any and all misconceptions on behalf of both the candidate and the law firm before a first meeting takes place. However, unexpected glitches do occur sometimes. Hiring requirements can change dramatically, based on the loss or addition of a client. An employee from another office might be brought in to fill a vacancy. A person who was planning to leave may decide to stay at the last minute, leaving you out in the cold. Be prepared for the unexpected. Life is like that. If you become one of our candidates, your resume will probably be submitted to more than one firm. When we agree to take you on as a client, we stick with you. We will "exhaust the well" while trying to help you land the job you deserve.

No matter how each interview turns out, we wish you all of the luck in the world as you continue to search for a better future. We hope this information will help you find a job that will allow you to become the star you deserve to be. Naturally, if we can help, let us know.