Interviewing Tips

The purpose of any interview is to assist the employer with their job screening process of finding the best candidate to fulfill the skills they are seeking. It is critical to conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times, especially during meetings, social functions and interviews. For most law students the most common forms of interviews will be screening and call-back interviews.

INTERVIEWING CONTEXTS

1. Screening Interviews
   Most commonly conducted in the form of on-campus interviews or during job fairs. The employer will most likely schedule several candidates back-to-back within 15 to 30 minutes of each other on a particular day. Screenings are usually conducted by one or two attorneys and only a select number of candidates will be invited back for more lengthy interviews.

2. Call-Back Interviews
   Candidates whom the interviewer or employers deem as a strong possibility for the position are called back for an extended interview with more in-depth questions. A call-back interview usually lasts anywhere from several hours to a full day.

3. Direct Contact Interviews
   A candidate who received an invitation to interview after submitting their application directly to the employer in response to a job posting listed online, in the newspaper or by the advice of a mutual acquaintance. It is hard to tell if the interview will be brief or lengthy since the structure is left purely up to the preference of the interviewer.

PREPARATION

Preparing yourself for an interview involves a lot more than just ironing your best suit, refining your resume and cover letter and being prepared to discuss topics listed on your resume. You will be asked key questions about your future plans, professional goals and what you expect to add to the organization. The following are some ways to better prepare yourself for a successful interview.

I. ATTIRE

   Always dress professionally for any type of interview. The employer is looking to see how you will represent their company in front of clients, judges and other professionals. Try on your outfit the week before your interview to ensure your entire outfit matches, fits well and has been ironed or dry cleaned. Do not wait until the last minute to find your clothes no longer fit or need to be cleaned. If you are unsure what qualifies as appropriate interviewing attire, please see the document Proper Interviewing Attire for more descriptions and examples.
II. LOGISTICS

Confirm the location of the interview no later than the day before. Larger firms sometimes have multiple office locations and you don’t want to show up at the wrong office the day of your interview. Map out and drive the route you plan to take before the interview to ensure an on-time arrival. Add at least 5 to 10 minutes to your drive time to account for traffic delays. On the day of the interview, be courteous to any and all people on the road and at the office, as you never know who you may encounter that could make an influence on the hiring decision.

III. WHAT TO BRING

It is always a good idea to have extra copies of these documents with you in case they are requested the day of the interview.

- Three copies of your resume and writing sample.
- A copy of your transcript.
- At least two copies of your professional references.
- Business Cards with your contact information.

You should bring these in a professional portfolio with a pen and paper for taking notes.

IV. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Be aware of your facial expressions and body language during the duration of your interview. The employer will be looking at your non-verbal communication and listening carefully to every response you make. Practicing your reactions to questions ahead of time in front of a mirror is a great way to make sure your body language is congruent with your speech. Greet the interviewer with confidence and a firm handshake, showing your sincere interest in the position. For more assistance with non-verbal communication, schedule a mock interview counseling appointment with the CPD office on Symplicity.

V. REVIEW YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

It is a good idea to review your resume, cover letter and writing sample prior to the interview. An employer will modify his or her interview questions based on the information you provided in your application materials to gain more information about you and your skills. Be ready to tell the employer how your knowledge, skills and abilities can help their organization.

VI. STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

More often than not, the questions related to your strengths and weaknesses will come up at some point during your interview. These may be in subtle form, but the employer is putting you to the test to see how you handle your responses. Even though we don’t always like to admit it, we all have some weakness that we could improve upon. The best way to handle your response is to keep
things positive. You may be thinking it is easy to keep a positive perspective when talking about your strengths, but how in the world do you turn a weakness into a positive? The best way to keep your answer positive is to turn your weakness into a strength. After presenting your weakness, follow it up with a solution about how you are currently working to improve upon this weakness.

VII. HANDLING INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

The interview process is both difficult and stressful without adding the problem of inappropriate or discriminatory questions. Interview questions should be related to your job skills and experiences and not about race, sex, religion, age, disability, marital status, color, birthplace, or national origin. While it is understandable you want to make a good impression, you are the only person who can determine how you want to handle each situation. If you are troubled by an interview experience, please speak with a counselor at the Center for Professional Development office while the experience, feelings and dialogue are still fresh on your mind.

VIII. INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST

☐ Dress professionally and prepare your materials the night before.

☐ Be prompt by arriving 10 to 15 minutes prior to your interview start time.

☐ Be courteous to all staff members, receptionists and other visitors.

☐ Use the restroom before your interview.

☐ Get a goodnight’ s rest; you want to be attentive to what the interviewer has to say.

☐ Look the interviewer in the eye; it conveys that you are paying attention and your statements are truthful.

☐ Remove distractions such as chewing gum, candy, breath mints, pocket change or cigarettes before your interview.

☐ Practice your handshake and introduction, making sure you can properly pronounce the interviewers name.

☐ Ask if you can receive a business card from the people you meet and provide your own in return.

☐ Answer all questions truthfully and to the best of your ability, keeping your responses positive.

☐ Remove your hat, coat, gloves, backpack or rain gear before your interview. If you are not offered a place to put them down, carry them with you and place them beside your chair.

☐ When addressing the interviewer, secretary or recruitment coordinator use their last name, unless you have been invited to call them by their first name.

☐ Be as concise as you can with your answers but avoid one or two-word responses. Remember, the recruiter is trying to get to know you.

☐ Avoid the use of slang or profanity at any time.

☐ Let the interviewer decide when the interview is over.

☐ Do not ask questions like, “Are you going to hire me for the position?” or “Did I get the job?” because these questions put the interviewer in a difficult position and could mean an automatic disqualification. Instead you should say something like, “I hope you consider me as a strong candidate for this position and I look forward to hearing from you.”

☐ Clear your daily agenda to anticipate a longer interview than originally expected; you do not want to have to leave before it is over.