Questions to Ask During Interviews

When an employer wraps up an interview he/she will ask: “Do you have any other questions for me?” At this point, you should ask the questions you prepared beforehand, conveying your level of interest in the position in which you are applying.

The types of questions you ask depend upon the type of position you are applying for and the person with whom you are interviewing. Your questions should be open-ended and the answers not easily obtainable on the internet. If you are interviewing for a part-time job during law school that will not lead to post-graduate employment, your questions should be closely related to work expectations of the employer and how work will be assigned to you. If you have an interview for a post-graduate position at a law firm, appropriate questions will be geared towards what life is like as an associate for the company.

Please be aware that not all the questions listed below will be appropriate for every interview setting.

SUMMER ASSOCIATE

- Does your summer program have a mentor system? If so, would you please describe it to me?
- What types of training will I receive other than research and writing assignments?
- When is the official start and end date of the summer program?
- Are there a minimum/maximum number of weeks that a summer associate can work?
- What types of projects are typically assigned to summer associates? Who assigns these tasks?
- Will I receive feedback following assignments? Who assigns these tasks? How often?
- Will projects be assigned individually or will I be collaborating with other summer associates?
- Do summer associates participate in pro bono work? If so, what type(s) of issues did they work on last summer?
- Will I work in one practice area or will I be able to rotate through practice groups?
- Does the firm allow split summer employment?
- What criteria does the firm consider when determining to make a summer associate a post-graduate associate offer?
- Will there be opportunities to meet attorneys outside of the office such as social events or gatherings?

FIRM STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

- How would you describe your firm’s culture?
- Is there mobility within the practice groups?
- Does the litigation section service clients of corporate partners?
- What criteria does the firm consider when determining whether to make an associate a partner?
- Are the other offices of your firm independently operated?
• If interested, can a summer associate spend part of the summer at another office?
• What practice areas have expanded in recent years despite the economic status?
• What practice areas do you foresee expanding in the coming years?
• What are the firm’s overall plans for the future?
• How would you describe the firm’s client base?
• If you could change anything about the firm, what would you change? (Do not ask the head of an organization this question, presumable he or she can change it.)

FIRM POLICIES

• What types of required activities are included/not included in billable hours?
• How soon would I be expected to build my own client base?
• Is there a billable hour expectation?
• (If the firm represents foreign clients or has a foreign office) How are attorneys selected for postings to your foreign office(s)? Are the postings highly competitive? What effect does an attorney’s decision to accept or decline such a posting have on his or her career at the firm?
• Are attorneys in your office engaged in pro bono work?
• If so, what kinds of pro bono work do the attorneys handle?
• How is the pro bono work treated for assignment, work load, and evaluation process?
• Would I receive any billable hour credit for pro bono work?

ASSOCIATE LIFE

• Does the firm have associate training programs outside of mandatory CLE’s?
• Do associates receive a CLE allowance?
• Do you have a mentoring program?
• Does the practicing chair or marketing director coach associates on client development?
• How frequently will I have performance reviews?
• Is work assigned by supervising shareholders in practice groups or from other practice areas?
• When does an associate become a specialist? Who decides and what criteria do they base their decision?
• When does an associate generally have contact with clients and take on major responsibility for cases or matters?
• Are new associates expected to travel?

PARTNERSHIP

• Is there more than one-tier of partner in your firm?
• What additional responsibilities are partners expected to perform?
• How is performance judged and by whom?
• What are the criteria for advancement and partnership?
• How long is the partnership track?
• How many partners have been elected in the last year?
Questions Geared Toward Public Interest Employers

STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION

- What kinds of clients, cases, or projects does your office typically see?
- How does the current political and economic climate affect your organization?
- How secure is your funding for the next two years? Who is involved in fundraising for your organization? Do sources of funding restrict the types of work your office may undertake?
- How do you evaluate and provide feedback to attorneys? How do attorneys advance?
- (If the organization is involved in lobbying or advocacy as well as litigation of cases) What is the percentage breakdown of time spent on the various activities? Who assigns matters to interns/new attorneys?
- Are certain areas or activities channeled to particular attorneys?
- If you could change the organization, what would you change? (Do not ask the head of an organization this question, presumably he or she can change it.)
- How does this organization interact with other organizations doing similar work?
- How does this office select its projects, clients, or cases?
- What would you say is the biggest success that your office has achieved in any forum? What would you say contributed most to that success?
- I have read the cases mentioned in descriptive materials from this office. Are there other materials that would give me a better understanding of the organization?

SUMMER INTERN/NEW ATTORNEY LIFE

- How much responsibility is given to summer interns/new attorneys?
- Please describe a typical work day and week for a summer intern.
- What is the organization’s history in hiring summer interns into permanent positions?
- What training is available for summer interns and new attorneys?
- How are new attorneys supervised?
- What is the biggest challenge your office now faces?