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A Comprehensive Guide to Interview Success for Legal Jobs

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A Guide to Interview Success

Congratulations, you have been offered an interview. You have an opportunity to demonstrate in person, to the prospective employer, why you best suit the role. It is also an opportunity for you to discover more about the role on offer and whether it would be suitable for you.

This guide will provide you with practical advice to help you prepare and impress at interviews with prospective employers.

Preparation

The importance of preparation cannot be stressed enough. It is essential for a successful interview. The better prepared you are, the more confident you will be.

- Know the address, how to get there, and time of the interview.
- Know the names and titles of all attendees.
- Know what role you are applying for, and a bit of background about the firm and the interviewers.
- Look at the firm's website to get some information about the firm.
- Review your CV, so you can answer questions on the work that you have undertaken, specific examples of your work, and clients you have dealt with.

Prepare the questions that you might ask during the interview.

For example:

- Why is the position available?
- What is the culture of the firm?
- What level of supervision/mentoring exists?
- What is the extent and nature of the firm's client base?
- What opportunities exist for career progression?
- What is the induction and training process?
- What is the firm's potential for growth?
- What would be the typical budget applied for someone at your level?
- What exposure to clients will you have?

Grooming and first impressions are always important considerations. Dress like a professional – modern and polished. No one has ever missed out on a job opportunity because they have been overdressed.

Do not wear casual clothes even if you know that it is company policy.

- Ask a friend to conduct a mock interview with you covering the questions on pages 7- 8. They will be able to provide feedback on your body language and help you refine your answers.

The first interview

During the interview, you will be assessed on your total performance including body language, communication skills, strengths, personal characteristics and of course your answers. It is also an opportunity for you and the interviewers to assess if you fit the culture of the firm.

Making the right first impression

- Arrive on time; punctuality is crucial.
- The impression you make starts from when you walk in the door. Relax and be confident.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm hand shake and a pleasantry such as “thank you for taking the time to meet with me today”.
- Use the interviewer’s first name. If you are not sure ask your consultant how to pronounce the name before attending the interview.
- Do not sit down before you are offered a seat. Look alert and appear interested at all times.
- Follow the interviewer’s lead and let them set the tone of the interview.

During the interview

You will be assessed on the following factors:

- A balanced and thoughtful approach with clear expression of thoughts.
- Confidence and enthusiasm coupled with tact, maturity, courtesy and politeness.
- Your body language. Maintain eye contact with all interviewers.
- The type of questions you ask and your approach to business.

Every interview is different, but be prepared with answers as well as supporting examples to questions such as:

- Why did you become a lawyer?
- Why are you interested in this role and firm?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- Given an example of a complex matter you have handled.
- What does team work mean to you?
- What management style suits you best?
- What are your main strengths and weaknesses?

Some other possible questions include:

- What job did you enjoy most and why?
- Give me an example of working to a deadline, and how you achieved it?
- Give an example of when you showed initiative?
- What have you done to develop professionally?
- Why do you want to leave your current role?

Listen to the questions being asked, and answer as fully as possible without over answering. You need to demonstrate clarity of thought and disciplined thinking.

Do not discuss salary at your first interview.

Your Hughes- Castell consultant will usually negotiate with the firm on your behalf or can otherwise give you guidance if you want to do the negotiation yourself.

What is behavioural-based interviewing?

The basic premise behind behavioural-based interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Law firms often use behavioural-based interview techniques.

How do I respond to behavioural-based interviewing?

• Firms decide what skills are necessary for the job and then ask questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. Prior to your interview speak to people who have worked there previously, read the company literature, and listen closely during the company's information session to determine which skills the employer is seeking.
• Your responses need to be specific and detailed. Answer the question using an anecdote or story following a three-step process: 1) briefl y describe the situation, 2) say what you did, and 3) report on the positive outcome.

• Always listen carefully to each question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely.
• Prepare to give examples of situations in which you have demonstrated the behaviors you have determined to be important to the employer.
• Use your resume as a guide when answering questions. Use examples from past work experience, classes and activities to illustrate your achievements.

Some sample behavioural-based interview questions

• Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
• Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
• Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to remove yourself from a difficult situation.
• Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
• By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.

• Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
• Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
• Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
• Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
• Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Closing the Interview

- Thank the interviewers for their time.
- Mention something that impressed you about the role or the firm.
- If you want the role let them know with a comment like "I am very interested in this role and working for your firm. I look forward to hearing from you soon."
- Ask what the next step is.

After the interview

Contact your Hughes-Castell consultant as soon as practicable after the interview to discuss how it went. It is important they know your feedback before the employer calls. Then relax, we will contact you as soon as we know anything further.

The second interview

It is common for an employer to conduct a second interview before making an offer. The second interview provides the opportunity for you to meet other people in the team. All the rules from the first interview apply to the second. It is usually a more relaxed process but you are still being assessed as to your fit with the team.

Reference checks

Employers will usually make an offer "subject to satisfactory verbal reference checks". You will be required to nominate 2 people who the firm can telephone to get a verbal reference for you. Usually your Hughes-Castell consultant will conduct these reference checks for the firm.

Select your referees carefully. At least one of them will need to be a current or former employer, unless there are good reasons not to use that person (such as that you don't want your current employer to know that you are job hunting).

Choose referees who will be able to comment knowledgeably on your work performance, style, history and so forth. 'Character' referees are only useful if you are applying for your first job and therefore don't have any previous employers to provide a reference.

Be sure to contact your intended referees beforehand to get their consent to act as a referee. Also contact them before the reference checks are to be carried out to let them know to expect a phone call from your Hughes-Castell consultant or the firm and to ensure that they will be available.

A final analysis

If you are successful – congratulations!

Your Hughes-Castell Consultant will guide you through the job offer stage and negotiate with your employer on your behalf.

If you are not successful review your performance and see if you can identify what you could do better next time. Then move on to the next one. You won't suit all firms and cultures, nor would you want to. Keep a positive attitude and use this one as practice for the next.

We trust that this interview guide has given you an insight into the things you need to consider in order to undertake a successful interview. If you have any questions regarding any aspect of the interview process please contact your Hughes-Castell consultant.

For more information please visit:
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