



INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

The short time you spend at a job interview could have a dramatic effect on your career prospects. It is therefore important that you perform well no matter how good your career record is to date. An employment interview remains an important step towards the fulfilment of your goals.

While it is not our intention to coach you to be something that you are not, it is our experience that a number of candidates do not know what to expect from an interview and will be completely unprepared or be nervous to the point where their interview performance seriously affects their chances, notwithstanding the person's ability to satisfy the requisite qualifications and/or practical experience for the position.

This information has been provided to you with the compliments of Law Staff. It has been compiled from the product of more than 20 years of research and employer/candidate feedback. These hints, combined with the guidance provided by our Client Advisors, will equip you with valuable information on how to conduct yourself during interviews with prospective employers.

NEGATIVE FACTORS TO BE MINDFUL OF:

During the course of an interview, the prospective employer will be evaluating your poise as well as your communication skills. Listed below are negative factors frequently evaluated at interview and those which most often lead to rejection.

- poor personal appearance - wearing an ill-fitting or crushed outfit, messy hair, or dirty shoes (indicative of the way you would normally present yourself in the eyes of their clients).
- an overzealous application of jewellery (i.e. 5 rings on one hand; we also recommend removing multi ear piercings or other visible body piercings).
- visible tattoos - whilst they may be fashionable in a social setting, it's always best to err on the side of caution and be conservative as these may be viewed as a distraction by many corporate environments.
- turning up late for the interview - indicating poor planning or organisational skills.
- answering a mobile telephone during an interview - indicating a sign of rudeness.
- limp, fishy hand shake - indicating nervousness or lacking confidence.
- unable to express your thoughts clearly - indicating poor thought processes, diction or grammar.
- lack of interest and enthusiasm - indicating a passiveness or indifference.
- overbearing and over-aggressive - indicating a conceited, "superiority" complex.
- evasive or making excuses - indicative of not being able to accept unfavourable factors in academic or employment record.
- exaggerated experience or ability.
- condemnation of past or present employer - indicative of how you could refer to them (your prospective employer) if and when you ever leave them in the future.
- failure to look the interviewer in the eye - indicating a lack of confidence or untrustworthiness.
- persistent attitude of "what can you do for me" - indicating selfishness and possibly a lack of team spirit.

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- over-emphasis on money - indicating an interest only in personal financial gain as opposed to developing or honing your skills.
- lack of preparation for interview - indicating a failure to get information on the position applied for, resulting in an inability to ask intelligent questions.
- giving random "off the cuff" answers to questions - indicating an inability to process thoughts and provide well considered responses.
- playing hard to get is not a winner in interviews - as opposed to showing a genuine interest in being there to discuss the opportunity.
- uncommercial appearance - (for females) plunging necklines, very short skirts, overly bright lipstick, bright unnatural hair colour, dirty and bitten fingernails and chipped nail polish; (for males) not shaving (with the exception of well groomed facial hair / beards), loud ties (particularly cartoon ties) and loud socks are not recommended.
- we recommend you dress in a smart outfit or business suit (dark blue is always preferable); never wear casual clothes, sports clothes or loud outfits; and tone down your hair colour to your more natural tone until you get 'a read' on what is likely to be accepted and what isn't (it's too late to do this after the interview) - you have made the impression and it will last, positively or negatively.
- smelling of cigarette smoke – unfortunately smokers never smell it on themselves however non-smokers will find it difficult not to, particularly when in a confined interview room. Despite your hope to the contrary, no amount of perfume or cologne will ever mask the smell and you have probably created another issue for yourself as overbearing fragrances or body odours of any kind are difficult to ignore.

BE PREPARED TO ANSWER HONESTLY QUESTIONS LIKE:

- do you feel that your academic record is indicative of your practical ability?
- do you intend undertaking any further courses?
- do you feel that you perform better in a supervised or autonomous role?
- what does teamwork mean to you?
- in what type of work do you feel you excel?
- what skills do you feel you need to enhance?
- name one or two significant things you have done which shows your initiative?
- what would you like to be doing in your career five years from now?
- what interests you most about our organisation?
- what was the size of your last salary review?
- realistically, what salary do you feel you can justify if you were offered this position?
- if required, can you get recommendations from your previous/current employer?

RESPONSES TO DIFFICULT QUESTIONS:

Unfortunately not all employers are skilled in the art of appropriateness when it relates to sensitive issues. But, that's where a well thought out response can save you from a potentially uncomfortable situation.

- If and when asked what your current salary is, we do not recommend you respond by saying "I don't want to tell you" or "I'd rather not say" or "I don't feel that is relevant" as these will inevitably be seen as dismissive. There is no easy way to continually avoid that question if it keeps being asked, but an initial well worded positive response might just deflect the question:

- ✦ "I am concerned that if I mention my current salary then this may influence you and I don't want to price myself out of the market. I want you to feel confident that my interest is in receiving only an appropriate level of market remuneration and I will be guided by you in this respect."



- ✦ “that’s an interesting question and one that I’m unsure how to answer as I wouldn’t want to put too much emphasis on money. I want to assure you that the role is of most importance to me and remuneration tends to look after itself once I have proven my ability and effectiveness to you in this role.”
- ✦ “money is not my primary focus and therefore if I was successful in being offered this role then I would remain receptive to hearing your thoughts on my value to you. I am really in your hands as to the level of remuneration you feel is appropriate, as my objective is to secure a role that will enhance my skillset and best serve my career for the long term as opposed to any short term gain if I focused solely on remuneration.”
- When asked why a person is leaving their current employer, a fair portion of employees’ motivation is due to an unhappiness with their co-worker, current manager, or employer as a whole. Unfortunately, whether fair or not, most prospective employers will judge you on the negative comments you may make, and may be testing you for precisely how you handle yourself in this respect. Our best advice is therefore to focus on the positive elements of your time with your current employer and or phrase your responses in a diplomatic manner. These examples may serve you well in that regard:
 - ✦ if it’s your Manager who is dismissive or is holding you back then - “I have enjoyed my time working with my current Manager. She has given me the benefit of her experience and has taught me well in terms of technical legal aspects. I’m now looking to take on some additional challenges with a Manager who may delegate greater responsibility for my own file management and client development. I believe that I have a lot to offer in this respect and by way of example I have managed to... (summarise some of your accomplishments here)”
 - ✦ if it’s your employer’s restrictive attitude towards marketing expenditure or limited capabilities to secure higher level clients then - “I have appreciated the time that my employer has given me and the exposure to some quality work. Unfortunately they have a small marketing budget and there is only so much of the upper level work to go around. Having had this exposure to quality work has only heightened my interest to do more. I’m hoping to join a firm that has a commitment to ongoing business development as well as an ongoing commitment to the development of their lawyers’ skills through a range of CPD programmes.”
 - ✦ if it’s an unsavoury occurrence or inappropriate behaviour then - “I’m looking to join an organisation that has a positive culture that also embraces contemporary staff relations policies. I relate well to strong leadership and a Manager who can harness his people to pull in the same direction. From what I have been told ... (quote name) has an environment that I would relate to”

PROBING QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:

Prepare the questions you may wish to ask of the prospective employer. Remember that an interview is a two way street. The employer will try to determine through questioning if you have the qualifications and ability to perform in that role. You also must determine through questioning whether the employer will give you challenging work to keep you interested for them long term, as well as providing the opportunity for the growth and development that you seek. Here are some suggestions for what you may ask with tact and diplomacy:

- for the prospective employer to furnish you with a detailed description of the position if they have one.
- the reason the position is available.
- how many people in this particular team or work group.
- the anticipated induction period.
- their ongoing commitment to the development of their employees’ skills.
- how does the organisation recognise its high performers.
- the likely promotional path for employees who do exceed expectations.



PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW:

- have a freshly pressed outfit to wear to the interview.
- manicure your nails the day before (that also applies to men as dirt and grime under the nails isn't received that favourably); if wearing nail polish, then ensure it isn't chipped and is a conservative design.
- know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's name, the correct pronunciation of his/her name (write it down and spell it correctly, then write a phonetic translation beside it).
- find out as many relevant facts about the organisation as you can - how many partners/directors they have, approximately how many employees in total, what range of services they have, particularly as it relates to the department you are applying for.
- refresh your memory on the facts and figures of your present/former employer.
- turn up on time for the interview.
- wash your hands with warm soapy water immediately prior to interview to avoid the potential clammy handshake.
- turn off your mobile phone before you go into the meeting.
- don't malign or make disparaging remarks about your employer, no matter how unsavoury the experience was or how justified you are in your comments as it never goes over well.

Our Client Advisors will be only too happy to assist you further with details relating to our client and their position. We wish you every success.

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DIRECTOR