

# JLEGAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

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## FOR CANDIDATES



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### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

You've just been called for an interview. Now what? Preparation is the key as the relatively short time you spend at an interview is to a large extent what separates you from other candidates and an offer.

Here are some tips and interview strategies to guide you through the interview process, and put you in a better position to clinch that job.

Before the Interview **P.R.E.P.A.R.E!**

#### **P – Punctuality.**

Be on time. You should always aim to arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes before the interview. Know exactly where you are going for the interview and allow plenty of time to get there. Being late is almost never excusable.

#### **R – Review your CV.**

It is imperative that you go through your CV and know it well. You will be expected to answer questions from any part of your CV including your various jobs to date, your involvement and responsibility in a specific deal, your education, qualifications and interests.

#### **E – Expect questions.**

There is no doubt the interviewer will ask questions to find out more about you and your motivations during the interview. Be prepared for frequently asked questions, some examples of which can be found at "Interview FAQs".

*“What is your biggest weakness?”* Answer: *“Potato crisps and chocolates.”*

#### **P – Plan questions.**

Typically at some point during the interview, you will be asked: do you have any questions for us? It is unfathomable to the interviewer that you do not have a single question for them! It reflects a lack of interest in their firm or company or the role in question. Some good questions can be found at "Questions you can ask".

#### **A – Appearance.**

Make sure you are well groomed and dressed in appropriate professional attire. Looking dishevelled will not make a good first impression and dressing conservatively is always the best option. Heavy makeup is to be avoided!

*“Never wear a backward baseball cap to an interview unless applying for the job of umpire.”* Dan Zevin

#### **R – Research.**

Read the company or firm's website and do your research! This is an essential part of preparing for the interview. Find out as much as you can about the firm you are interviewing with, the partners in the relevant practice area, its key clients and offices. A lot of this information will be readily available on the firm's website.

For in-house roles, try to find out as much as you can about the company e.g. what products or services are provided, financial performance of the company in recent years, what its target markets are and its future growth plans. Again, a website search should readily bring up most of this information.

Your consultant will help by giving you insights to the firm or company, and the interviewers' personalities where possible. If you know someone who has worked at the firm or company, that is often an excellent source of information as well.

### **E – Exact information.**

Know exactly who the interviewer/s will be, what their titles are and how to correctly pronounce their names. Use their names during the interview as it will help connect you with the interviewers.

## **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

**Conduct:** Most employers have already seen your paper qualifications so are keen to see whether you can be a good fit within their team and company or firm generally. This basic code of conduct should help you perform to the best of your ability at the interview!

### **Avoid:**

- Displaying an aggressive or overbearing personality.
- Showing a lack of interest or enthusiasm in the role or the firm/company.
- An inability to clearly express your thoughts or get your point across.
- Rambling answers - succinctness is a highly valued trait by most employers.
- Nervousness or poor eye contact.
- A limp handshake (it is surprising how much of a bugbear this is for many interviewers!).
- Displaying a blatant interest in money and benefits only - try not to discuss this at all during an interview, unless it is raised first by the interviewer.
- Having a lack of good questions about the role and firm or company.
- Derogatory comments about your past or current employer.
- Displaying a lack of direction in your career

### **Do try to:**

- Make good eye contact, shake hands firmly.
- Be courteous, confident and friendly.
- Appear interested and positive about the role and firm/company.
- Be a good listener.
- Ask considered and thoughtful questions.
- Answer all questions truthfully. If you don't know an answer to a technical question, just say so. Do not try to 'wing it'!
- Always wait for the issue of salary to be brought up first and if asked about expectations, try to just say 'market rate' without being pinned down to a figure.
- Fill out all application forms required upon arrival without complaining even if this information is replicated in your CV. Reluctance to do this can create a negative impression and in some cases has even eliminated potential candidates.
- Relate how your experience and background are suitable for the position.
- Always conduct yourself as though you are determined to get the job. Lack of enthusiasm or worse, detachment, is one of the common negative feedback we receive.

*“What interests you about our company?”* Answer: *“Um, I heard you were hiring?”*

## INTERVIEW FAQs

During the course of the interview, be prepared to answer questions like:

- Why did you choose to become a lawyer?
- Tell us a bit about yourself and your career to date?
- Why would you like to join this firm/company?
- What do you know about our current deals or business?
- Why are you looking to leave your current employer?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time? 10 years' time?
- Would you be willing to travel for work?
- Would you be willing to relocate?
- What has been your greatest achievement at work to date?
- How would your colleagues or bosses describe you?
- What style of management do you respond best to?
- Are you interviewing with other firms/companies? (tip: be honest if you are, but don't spend a lot of time on this. Focus instead on why you are interested in THIS particular job.)
- What has caused you to look for a new role?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you know about our firm/current clients/business?
- What do you see as your main strengths? Give me an example?
- What do you see as your weaknesses/areas to improve?

The questions above form part of a more traditional interview. Some employers, however, prefer to use a technique called behavioural interviewing. This type of interview uses questions about your past and present performance to predict your future performance and likelihood of success in the particular role you are interviewing for.

You are expected to give specific examples of when you demonstrated particular skills or competencies the employer is looking for. The employer is not looking for a vague or general response. You are expected to provide in detail what you did in a particular situation and what the outcome was.

*“Can you work under pressure?”* Answer: *“I've been tested to 12 ft-lbs per square inch”*

Interview FAQs

The following are some sample behavioural interview questions:

- Give me an example of a time when you had difficulty getting someone to accept your ideas. What was your approach and did it work? **[Leadership]**
- Give me an example of when you went above and beyond the call of duty. **[Motivation and Dedication]**
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and how you coped with it. **[Stress tolerance]**
- Have you ever had to sell an idea to your boss or colleagues? How did you do it and did they buy it? **[Communication and Persuasiveness]**
- What have you done to contribute towards a teamwork environment? **[Interpersonal skills and Teamwork]**
- How do you decide what gets prioritised when you are scheduling your work? **[Time Management]**
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it. **[Problem solving]**
- Give me an example of how you dealt with a difficult colleague. **[Interpersonal skills]**

*“During job interviews, when they ask: ‘What is your worst quality?’ I always say: ‘Flatulence’. That way I get my own office.”* Dan Thompson

The interviewer may also ask very specific behavioural-based questions based on your CV, for example:

- Tell me about your experience with [a deal on your CV] and what was the most significant issue you had to deal with? **[Knowledge and understanding of a transaction]**
- What were the particular challenges you faced working in [a jurisdiction you have worked in] and how did you overcome these? **[How to navigate difficult jurisdictions/knowledge of particular regulatory or legal “quirks”]**

Occasionally an employer will ask an odd question just to see how a candidate responds to non-conventional question. Here are some examples of ‘curve-ball’ questions asked:

*“If you were an animal, what animal would you be and why?”*

*“Using a scale of 1 to 10, rate yourself on how weird you are.”*

*“Given the numbers 1 to 1,000, what is the minimum number of guesses needed to find a specific number, if you are given the hint ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ for each guess you make?”*

*“Explain quantum electrodynamics in two minutes, starting now.”*

*“How many balloons would fit in this room?”*

*“If you were shrunk to the size of a pencil and put in a blender, how would you get out?”*

*“If you could be any superhero, which one would you be?”*

*“How do you weigh an elephant without using a scale?”*

*“Why do you think only a small percentage of the population makes over \$125,000 a year?”*

*“How many bricks are there in Shanghai? Consider only residential buildings.”*

## QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

You should have a few good questions ready during the interview. Apart from showing that you have prepared well for the interview, you are also using this as an opportunity to interview the employer and to assess whether the firm or company and the role are a good fit for you.

Here are some questions that you can ask:

- Why has this position become available? If it is a replacement role, why did the last person leave?
- What is the firm's or company's management style?
- What are the reporting lines of this position? Will I get an opportunity to meet with direct or dotted line reports?
- How much travel is expected?
- What sort of people have done well in this role?
- What training and development programs does the firm or company offer?
- When are performance reviews undertaken?
- What are the firm's or company's expansion plans? Target areas of growth?
- What sort of administrative support will there be, if any?
- What is the makeup of the current team and where would I fit within the overall structure?

You can also ask the interviewer more direct questions such as:

- What do you like most about working in this firm/company?
- What is your background and how long have you been in this firm/company?

## CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW AND POST-INTERVIEW

Always thank the interviewer/s for their time and if appropriate, ask them what the next step is or how soon you can expect to hear from them. You might want to send a brief follow-up email to thank the interviewer/s but this is usually not necessary.

Call your JLegal consultant as soon as you can after the interview to give your feedback on your impression of the interview. If you have any further questions or require clarification on certain issues, let your consultant know so that he/she can follow up with the employer when obtaining feedback on your interview