

# Questions To Ask During Interviews

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**SPRING 2007**

## Asking Questions During Interviews

One of the ways that an employer will evaluate the depth of your interest is by the nature of the questions *you* ask. You want to ask questions that show that you are interested in the employer, have already researched them, and want to learn more. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with simple research e.g., NALP form, website, promotional brochure. Try to take your questions to greater depth -- employers appreciate interviewees who have done their research.

Avoid confrontational or self-interested questions during the interview phase. Once you have been given an offer, feel free to dig deeper into hours requirements, work/life balance issues, etc. But avoid these questions when you are interviewing so that you don't appear too self-interested. Your job during interviews is to impress the employer with what you have to offer them. Your job once you are deciding among offers is to figure out which will be the best for you personally.

Bear in mind that different questions are appropriate depending on when in your law school career you are interviewing with an organization. For law firms, it is appropriate to ask questions about associate life at the firm when you are interviewing for a summer associate position, because it is likely that a summer associate position will lead to employment as an associate after graduation. For other employers and situations in which you are interviewing for a position during school that will not likely lead to post-graduate employment, you will want to confine your questions more to general questions about the employer and about the specific position you are interviewing for. As a 3L interviewing for employment after graduation, more forward looking questions are appropriate. Use your best judgment as you adapt these suggestions to your specific job search.

### Suggested Questions

- How is the organization departmentalized?
- Do interns/summer associates rotate through departments? What is the length of rotation period?

- How fluid are departmental structures – do attorneys often handle work in multiple departments, or do they pass off work outside of their area to a different person or team?
- Are offers extended by a particular department/group?
- Once you join a department/group, is there mobility?
- How are assignments distributed? Does this vary by department/group?
- How are important decisions made within the organization?
- How does the organization handle attorney/associate evaluation?
- Is there a formal mentoring system? Is there an organized system for attorneys/associates to discuss individual or collective questions? What about informal mentoring opportunities?
- How are young attorneys trained? Are there specific benchmarks for new attorney development, or does it vary by department and work load?
- What types of logistical support are available for young attorneys?
- How would you characterize the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your favorite thing about working here?
- What is the organization looking for in the ideal candidate?

### Law Firm Specific

- How would you describe the general character of the firm?
- What makes the firm unique? What are some of its special qualities or traditions?

- How many billable hours are annually expected of an associate?
- What constitutes a billable hour -- only chargeable client work? Recruiting work? Business promotion? *Pro Bono* work? Outside activities with marketing potential?
- Is *pro bono* work allowed? encouraged? required?
- How much emphasis is placed on bringing in new business?
- What types of clients does the firm represent?
- Describe the breadth of the client base. Does one client represent more than 10% of the firm's business?
- In what areas does the firm need attorneys?
- Are attorneys asked to specialize? How soon?
- What are future growth areas of the firm?
- How are important decisions made within the firm? What are the major firm committees, their jurisdictions and ultimate authority within their jurisdictions?
- What opportunities exist for becoming involved in community activities?
- What cultural and recreational activities do members of the firm pursue?
- Why did you choose this firm?
- What are you working on now? What is your typical case/deal load? (asked of associates, not partners)
- What is the "normal" partnership track? Is this standard for all practice areas in the firm?
- How many associates have made partner over the last five years?

- What does "becoming a partner" mean? One tier or two-tier system? What are the differences between the two? How long to make first tier or second tier? Is there attrition between the two? If so, on what basis? What happens to those who don't make the second tier? Do they stay or leave?

### **Public Interest/Government Specific**

Bear in mind that each public interest organization and government office is unique – make sure that you do your research on the specific employer you are interviewing with and tailor your questions appropriately. The following are suggestions to get you started.

- What are the responsibilities of the position?
- What is the case load like?
- What are the unique challenges of working with the issue/population you serve?
- How is the organization funded? (for public interest organizations)
- What is the hierarchy that this position reports to? (for government employers)
- What types of claims do you deal with most often?
- How do clients/cases come to the organization?
- What is the process for determining what clients/cases the organization will represent?
- What percentage of potential clients/cases does the organization take on?
- For you, what is the most satisfying part of working for this organization?
- Does the organization offer any type of law school loan repayment program?