

DOUGLAS HOPE

Douglas Hope specialises in assisting solicitors and partners in **England and Wales**

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview is the most important part of your job application. The personal interview remains the most common method of assessing candidates and is usually the forum from which the decision will be made on who is the 'best' person for the position.

Most interviews last about one hour and often provide the one chance to get it right. Beforehand make sure you double check the venue of the interview as well as the date and time. Plan your journey in advance allowing extra time for unforeseen traffic or misdirection. Check the name of the person or people who will be interviewing you and their positions within the organisation. Remember to take the telephone number of the offices at which you are being interviewed.

PREPARATION

Research and preparation are key elements to a successful interview. However, it is important to mention at this stage that you can also overdo it. Over preparation can be just as dangerous as doing very little research as it can lead to unnecessary anxiety and tension that will make you come across as 'wooden', 'over-formal' and lacking in personality. Be confident enough to accept that you cannot predict exactly how any interview will go, what questions are asked of you and how the client will react to you and the answers you provide. In having this confidence the interview should flow more naturally and will allow you to relate to the interviewer as the situation demands whilst allowing your personality to come through.

Putting the right level of time and effort into your preparation will give you confidence, enable you to relax and should allow you to have listed a useful amount of relevant questions. Questions to ask your consultant before the interview include how long the interview will last, will it be technical, will you be expected to make a presentation, is there a test and if so what format will it take.

Research the organisation thoroughly. Your contact at Douglas Hope will be able to help you with this but you should carry out your own research as well. Useful sources of information include:

- ⊙ The firm's website - this is often an excellent source of material and can provide up to date information on recent events, publications, press releases and details about the

solicitors within the practice

- ⊙ Legal journals and publications
- ⊙ Legal directories
- ⊙ Any brochures, annual reports or other literature produced by the firm

Research the department to which you are applying, it is useful to find out how big it is, what kinds of personalities and backgrounds have the solicitors got within it and how the department is structured. Find out how many people will be interviewing you, who they are, their position in the firm, how long they have been there, what they are like and whether you may be reporting to them.

Prepare a list of relevant questions to ask during or at the end of the interview that are pertinent to the role, the department and the firm. This demonstrates enthusiasm whilst allowing you to get any extra information you require from the interviewers. If you have carried out your research well this should provide you with a decent amount of suitable questions.

Read through your CV until you are totally familiar with it. Your CV often forms the basis of discussion at the interview so it is imperative that you are fully aware and confident of its contents. Use the information contained in your CV to highlight your strengths and relevant skills and experience in the interview.

Think carefully about the questions that you are likely to be asked at interview, whilst it is important not to dwell on every possible scenario that may arise there are some common questions that are easy to prepare for that often do come up. These include:

- ⊙ Tell me about yourself?
- ⊙ Why did you choose this firm?
- ⊙ What do you know about the firm?
- ⊙ Why did you choose to pursue a career in law?
- ⊙ What interests you about your particular specialism?
- ⊙ What are your strengths?

- ⊙ What are your weaknesses (never answer “none”) / what have you done to address your weaknesses?
- ⊙ Why are you leaving your current firm?
- ⊙ How do you cope under pressure?
- ⊙ Describe your marketing methods / experience
- ⊙ Do you have a following?
- ⊙ What is your billing track record / potential?
- ⊙ How well do you work as part of a team?
- ⊙ How would your team describe you?
- ⊙ Give examples of how your management style has been effective
- ⊙ Give examples of your delegation skills
- ⊙ What are the major achievements in your professional and / or non-professional life?
- ⊙ Where do you hope to be in a set period of time from now (1 year, 5 years etc.)?
- ⊙ How do you prioritise your workload?
- ⊙ How do you spend your spare time?
- ⊙ Give an example of when you have shown initiative in your current position
- ⊙ What have you learnt over the course of the last 5 years?
- ⊙ What are your goals in life, how will this position help you to achieve them?
- ⊙ What has been the most challenging point in your career to date, how did you overcome it?

PRESENTATION

First impressions are vital. It is crucial that you dress professionally and on the conservative side. A number of firms now have casual dress codes, however it is important that you still wear a suit to your interview. Men should wear a smart dark suit, fresh crisp shirt, a business tie (nothing outrageous), polished shoes and dark socks. Women should wear a smart dark suit or trouser suit, skirts should be neither too long or too short, clean shoes (no high heels), try to limit makeup and always wear tights or stockings. Remember you are far less likely to offend by dressing too conservatively than by going the other way. Men and women should keep jewellery to a minimum and ensure that hair is well groomed.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

It is good practice to arrive in the reception of the firm approximately 10 minutes before the interview. This will give you a chance to relax, take a few breaths and allow you to make yourself more familiar with the surroundings. Do not become too pre-occupied with your surroundings as you must ensure that your attention remains firmly on the interview. Whilst it is highly undesirable for you to be late, if you are unavoidably delayed or detained call ahead as soon as possible to explain your late arrival. When you inform the receptionist of your arrival remember that they are an employee of the firm so at this stage the interview process has already begun.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

It has consistently been shown through research that the majority of all interviews are decided in the first 5 minutes and they rarely change for the better or worse. It is therefore crucial that your entrance and introduction are right. First impressions really do count, this fact cannot be underestimated. Enter the room confidently and positively, a firm handshake and an engaging smile are vital at this stage. Only sit down once invited to do so. It is important to appear calm, whether you are or not, and maintain eye contact throughout your interview.

Try and remain natural during the interview, remember to be yourself. Be alert and aware at all times of your body language (sitting slightly forwards implies interest, do not cross your arms as this comes across as defensive), sit up straight and keep an upbeat and positive interest about the firm and the position (even if your level of interest has changed, keep your options open at this stage). Be aware of the interviewer's body language as well, this may give you an idea as to how they are feeling the interview is going, for example if the interviewer is looking bored it may be that you are beginning to ramble.

Listen to each question and make sure you understand it before you start to answer. Your answers should be succinct, keeping to the point without being too brief, never reply to a question with monosyllabic "yes" or "no" answers. Speak clearly and deliberately. Be aware not to ramble in

your answers and do not be afraid of not talking. Silence is a tool used by interviewers and one that often catches candidates out, when you have answered your question stop and do not be tempted to fill silent gaps with irrelevant chatter. If you do not fully understand a question ask for clarification.

At every possible opportunity you should be selling yourself, keeping your answers achievement-orientated and highlighting wherever possible your strengths and abilities. Use your knowledge and research wherever possible and when appropriate to highlight your interest and show that you are keen. Never lie in an interview as you may be asked to support everything you say with specific and quantifiable examples. Do not be tempted to make jokes in the interview as this could well backfire. Instead try to build up a rapport with the interviewer/s, a positive, confident and enthusiastic approach will help.

Do not be negative about your current or previous employers, appearing bitter or resentful will not highlight you as a good perspective new recruit. Try to avoid putting yourself across in a negative light by discussing any weaknesses or problems in your career or life to date. If the interviewers do raise these points do not dwell on them but instead highlight how you have learned and improved enabling you to add value because of these experiences in the future.

Do not discuss remuneration at the first interview unless specifically asked. Financial negotiations and considerations are best left until after the interview once you have discussed the outcome and way forward with your consultant. Ask the questions you have prepared if they have not been covered in the interview. Try to ask at least two relevant and intelligent questions this will show enthusiasm as well as demonstrating your knowledge of the firm and the position. Use this opportunity to clear up any questions you may have, the interview is a two-way process allowing an exchange of information between both parties. Do not ask about the salary, benefits or holidays at this stage. Whilst you can never totally predict what topics may come up in the interview and whether or not your prepared questions will end up being covered or become irrelevant for some reason during the meeting there are a few ideas that are worth considering, these include:

- ⊙ How does the employer perceive this role within the organisation?
- ⊙ What career prospects are available?
- ⊙ Why has the position become available?
- ⊙ What are the future plans for the department / firm?
- ⊙ How do you appraise the performance of your employees?
- ⊙ Who do you regard as your main competitors?
- ⊙ What are the firm's training and development procedures?
- ⊙ What are the long term prospects for the successful candidate?
- ⊙ What are the firm's main objectives?
- ⊙ Ask the interviewers about themselves, what are their backgrounds, why do they enjoy working for the firm?

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

Do not forget to let the perspective employer know that you are interested in the position, it is important to ensure that the interviewers know that you have enjoyed your meeting. Leave the interview in the same positive manner in which you arrived and ask what the next stage will be and when you are likely to hear from them. Thank the interviewer for their time, shake their hand again and smile remembering to always retain eye contact. As much as possible try and enjoy the interview and see it as a valuable experience.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Soon after the interview make some notes about the meeting and any further questions or queries you may subsequently have. Make an honest assessment of your performance. Interviews are highly subjective and sometimes things 'click' and sometimes they don't. Discuss the interview with your consultant and be prepared to listen to honest and constructive feedback, even if at times this may not always be positive ensure that you learn from the experience for future interviews.

It is important to make contact with your consultant soon after the meeting so that they can relay any feedback they may have and likewise ascertain what questions, queries or concerns you may

have in order to gain answers from the client as soon as possible. If a second interview is required this can be arranged efficiently and any knowledge or feedback that the consultant has can be passed on to you in order to provide you with the best possible chance of success.

Try to plan for a second interview as you did for the first and spend time in preparing any more detailed questions you may have before you attend. Discuss any reservations, concerns or queries with your consultant beforehand, by utilising their substantial knowledge and expertise you can maximise your chances of a positive outcome. Remember that your consultant has many years experience in the entire recruitment process and will be able to advise you at each stage, assisting you in securing the best possible position.

SOCIAL INTERVIEWS

On occasions organisations choose to use a more social meeting as part of their interview and selection process. This can take the form of a lunch, drinks after work or an evening meal with one or more individuals from the firm. This style may also be used as an opportunity for you to meet other members of the team and for them to meet you. It is important to remember that this is still an interview and you are on show.

Be careful not to drink too much, only smoke if other team members do - don't over-smoke. You will undoubtedly be assessed on your ability to mix and get on with a variety of people, make your presence felt without being too overbearing, be confident but not arrogant. Ask questions about the individuals in the team, people always like to talk about themselves and it will take the heat off you.

As with the traditional interview situation always be yourself and avoid exaggerating, do not lie as this could well backfire. Try to enjoy the occasion and make the most of the opportunity to find out as much about the firm, the department and the people as possible in order to make an informed decision about the position you have applied for.