

## **A Guide to Interview Success**

Prior to any interview, we will provide you with bespoke advice as to how to approach that interview. However, we have set out below some very general tips which should assist you in any interviews you secure.

### **PREPARATION**

Know the address and time of the interview as well as the names and titles of all attendees. If you do not know the exact location of the firm, it is advisable to print off a map and directions. Always allow yourself sufficient time to get to the interview and plan the route if necessary. There is nothing worse than arriving at an interview hot and flustered.

Ensure that you are adequately briefed on the role in question and conduct some background research on the firm and individuals with whom you are meeting. Any prospective employer will want to see that you are fully aware of the firm's strengths and notable successes and any recently published news about them. CapeClarke is here to assist with this detailed preparation.

One of the biggest mistakes we see is candidates not fully knowing the details of their CV. Perhaps this is because it was drafted a few months ago, however there really is no excuse for this in the prospective employer's mind. Thoroughly acquaint yourself with your own CV, including the work that you have undertaken, specific examples of your work, and clients you have dealt with. Please remember that an interview is a two-way process – it is your chance to ask the interviewer certain questions. Prepare the questions that you might want to ask during the interview and rehearse them. It is NOT advisable to ask any salary-related questions – CapeClarke will conduct all of this on your behalf.

Examples of popular questions are:

- What is the firm's potential for growth/strategy for the future?
- Describe the firm's client base?
- Size of the division/department/practice group?
- Why is the position available?
- What is the culture within the firm?
- What opportunities exist for career progression?
- What level of supervision exists? (this should obviously only be asked if you are relatively junior)
- What is the level of marketing budget?
- What level of client contact will I be exposed to?

First impressions are absolutely essential. A lot of this is common sense, but these are factors that are not often given consideration, until the last minute. Dress conservatively, but maintain a look that is contemporary and polished. Shoes must be polished and appropriate to the outfit.

Our consultants are able to conduct a mock interview with you. We will observe your body language and give you feedback on your answers and the answering style. This will be particularly useful if you have not experienced an interview for a while and is likely to ensure that you are less nervous when the time comes.

### **THE DAY ITSELF**

During the interview, the potential employer will consider your total performance including body language, communication skills and, of course, your answers. Many employers will also look for culture fit and rapport with the people with whom you are likely to be working. As you will know, different firms do have very different cultures, therefore it is important to discuss with us whether there is a likely fit.

The correct frame of mind is crucial to interview success. You may have all kinds of issues going on in your personal life, but this has to be put to one side for the interview. On the way to the interview try to block this out and focus purely on your legal experience and what value you can add to the prospective law firm. Have complete confidence in your abilities. Remember, some nerves are okay, and in fact, many people do not perform at their best without them. Punctuality is crucial, and arriving late or far too early is very unprofessional. If you do arrive early, wait in the lobby and do not proceed to the offices of the interviewer until it is close to the time allocated for your appointment. If you are running late, and you are going to be delayed for more than ten minutes, call CapeClarke in advance and we will explain your predicament. Upon arriving at reception, remember that you are already making an impression on your prospective employers. Just prior to asking for the interviewer by name, tell yourself that you are meeting with non-adversarial colleagues for a friendly chat. By adopting this attitude your body language is more likely to be relaxed, yet confident, and regardless of how senior, serious, or seemingly unapproachable the interviewer might be, you will be less likely to feel nervous.

Greet the interviewer and shake hands firmly. Remember to look the interviewer in the eye.

It is important to greet the interviewer by his or her first name, and be sure of the pronunciation. Do not sit down before you are offered a seat. Then, take a seat carefully, making sure that you are sitting upright. Look alert and appear interested at all times. Even if you realise very quickly that this firm is not for you, it is important to maintain your professionalism.

The interviewer will look for the following in assessing your interview positively:

- A relaxed yet professional approach – try to smile as much as possible;
- A balanced and thoughtful approach;
- Confidence and enthusiasm;
- Clear expression of thought;
- Positive body language – do not slouch or cross your arms in front of you;
- Maintenance of eye contact;
- A flexible and commercial approach;
- Knowledge of the job and of the firm;
- Intelligent questions; and
- Maturity, courtesy and politeness.

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

- Can you claim to have a following of clients?
- Do you have evidence of clients that have followed you?
- What are your perceptions of the firm?
- Why would you like to work for us?
- How would your clients describe you?
- What are your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- What makes you a good lawyer?
- What would a previous employer say about you?
- What do you hope to achieve by working here?
- What was your last salary and bonus? (always answer with detail)
- What is the highest value matter that you are working on at the moment?
- Describe a complex matter you have handled
- How much business development do you undertake?
- How do you manage your time effectively?
- Do you deal with pressure well?
- Do you prefer to work autonomously or in a team environment?
- What do you consider to be your main strengths and weaknesses?

- What sort of hours do you work?
- What is your current charge out rate and budget?
- What do you think determines a person's progress at a firm?
- What is the most significant obstacle you have had to overcome?
- What book are you reading at the moment?
- In what way have you developed your ability to encourage and motivate those around you?
- Why are you seeking to move and why did you leave your current/previous role?
- How do you spend your spare time, what are your hobbies?

A good interview is one that becomes slightly more of a chat, rather than question followed by answer all the way through. If you can try and strike this balance, it will bode well. Ensure that you listen to the questions being asked, and answer as fully as possible without getting carried away. Remember that they are looking for clarity of thought and succinct disciplined thinking. It is perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment in order to compose a response. Provide responses that are clear, relevant and provide adequate information. If you do not know an answer to a fairly crucial question, remain authoritative and state that you will endeavour to provide the answer shortly after the interview – this simply mirrors how you would act with a client in a similar situation where you did not know the legal answer to their question (which we all know happens from time to time).

#### **THE CLOSE OF INTERVIEW**

The last impression is as important as the first. If there was anything about the position or the firm that impressed you, mention it briefly.

Ask what the next step will be and what the timeframe will be to fill the role. It is acceptable and encouraged that during the closing section of the interview, you mention something along the lines of 'I am very interested in the role and look forward to hearing from you'. If there were any questions you failed to answer fully, remind them that you will provide the answer as soon as practicable. Thank the interviewer(s) for his/her/their time.

#### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

As remarkable as some of these may appear, candidates often fail to progress for the following reasons – try to avoid these pitfalls where possible:

- Poor presentation – scruffy shoes, top shirt button undone (for males), unkempt hair etc;
- Weak handshake – especially applicable for males;
- Failure to maintain eye contact;
- Poor communication skills;
- Being too introverted or too extroverted – try to perform consistently;
- Inability to express thoughts clearly;
- Lack of career planning;
- Lack of enthusiasm or motivation;
- Lack of confidence or nervous habits such as nail biting, and equally so, displaying overconfidence or arrogance;
- Over-answering questions and failing to know when to stop talking;
- Wanting more money – more money than the market would expect for someone at your level/experience; and
- Lack of technical knowledge.

Hopefully, you have found this advice useful. Should you wish to discuss any of the points raised above, please do feel free to contact us and one of our consultants will be more than happy to help.

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