

You Got the Interview: Now Get Ready by Carroll Welch

You receive a call from Employer X asking you to come in for an interview in two days at 9:30am. You're thrilled! Your job search has been moving slowly so getting an interview feels like a coup. But now what? You have some work to do. Most people who have experienced walking out of an interview for which they were unprepared know that it's a punishing experience and one that they never want to repeat. You may have rambled on incoherently about a summer clerkship, drawn a blank when asked about a securities litigation case that you worked on two years ago, or have been so nervous that you know you seemed 'flat' and without personality. The risk of your making most of these mistakes can be reduced dramatically with adequate pre-interview preparation of two kinds: Know Thyself and Know Thy Interviewer.

Know Thyself. Despite how it sounds, this part of interview prep, is not so much an existential exercise as a practical, in depth inventory of the legal knowledge, skills and experience that you have to offer this employer. You need to be able to communicate about this concisely and fluently. In other words, how do you add value? Preparing to talk about your value in an interview requires preparation on these areas:

- **“Tell me about yourself.”** This frequently used conversation opener seems deceptively simple, but stop right now and respond. . . It's not as easy as it seems. It requires thought and clarity to come up with a strong response. The interviewer doesn't want your chronological life story, e.g., Well, I graduated from law school in 2009 and then I went to work at ...” Instead, you want to provide a punchy, compelling summary of who you are with confidence: “I'm a native New Yorker and an attorney with three years' of trusts and estates experience that I developed at a boutique firm in Boston. Our clients were high net worth individuals and I helped them with every possible estate planning need. I've recently relocated back home to NY and am excited to begin the next chapter of my career at a small firm where I can continue to develop my very strong drafting and interpersonal communication skills.” This summary is brief, combines relevant personal and professional information, emphasizes strengths and demonstrates enthusiasm and proactivity.
- **Know your resume.** If you have a well drafted resume, it provides an excellent summary of both your legal skills and knowledge. Be prepared to talk about the substantive areas of your legal knowledge, and the skills (whether direct or transferable) that you have. Doing this well is at least 90% of the work of an interview. Dissect and analyze the matters that you've worked on for skills and knowledge developed so that you can 'retrieve' any of them from memory like a file from a drawer. Having this information accessible in your mind will also be helpful for behavioral event interview questions, in which employers ask candidates to recall situations in which they demonstrated a certain skill or competency.
- **Just be your (adaptive) self.** When you go on an interview, don't 'just be yourself'. Instead, *know what you need to be* and *be that* to make it successful. Whether you happen to be an extremely shy and soft spoken person of very few words or a nervous babbling, know that about yourself and take whatever steps are necessary to enable you to be adaptive. These steps may include coaching, counseling, therapy, meditation, or simply planning well the time leading up to the interview so that you will not be anxious or depleted and can be the type of strong candidate that you need to be for a successful interview.

Know Thy Interviewer. This part of the preparation is more like a checklist of required research items or homework that just can't be skipped:

- **Review the employer website.**
- **Know their social media presence in all forms and be knowledgeable about recent activity.**
- **Be aware of any recent media coverage.**
- **Review your interviewers' bios or profiles whenever possible.**
- **Speak to any contacts who are current or past employees to get a better understanding of the culture and environment.**
- **Know about any recent major events such as layoffs, lawsuits, or controversies that, although you will likely not be discussing, you can be sensitive about.**
- **Know the role that you are applying for. When possible, talk with someone at the employer's office or with a counterpart to understand its functions better.**
- **Use your questions wisely.**

The last item above deserves further explanation. When your interviewer asks, "so, do you have any questions for me?", unless it has already been a long extensive interview, you must have two to three thoughtful, sophisticated questions that you have prepared and that will advance your cause as a candidate. As explained by a Yorkson Legal Inc. recruiter, "Asking intelligent questions is a reflection on how you think so do not ask obvious or generic questions." She also notes that the questions should "pertain to the job at hand, the department, the dynamics of the team, how the group is structured and what specifically the interviewer is looking for in their ideal candidate aside from basic experience and education." Questions asked in the interview can make a critical difference in how your interviewer evaluates your performance.

Thorough interview preparation enhances your candidacy, makes an enormous difference in how you perform, and often boosts confidence, which contributes to further interviewing success. Don't skip it!

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