Interview Tips for 2Ls

Ian Fisher and Gene Endress - October 12, 2017

The second year of law school presents students with many new challenges, but for most 2Ls, no challenge looms larger than securing a high-quality internship or employment opportunity for next summer. If you are a 2L, then by now you have polished your résumé, submitted some applications and, if you're lucky, earned an interview with a would-be employer. (Throughout this article, for the sake of simplicity, we will refer to legal "employers." But the interviewing techniques outlined in this article are applicable in all legal interviews, whether the applicant seeks a summer position at a law firm, a judicial externship, an internship at a nonprofit organization, a government position, or anything in between.) The interview process is the last obstacle between you and that summer position you've been striving to land. This article provides you with important information and a few tips and tricks to guide you through the process and maximize your chances of success. Each heading below analyzes a different key to success in an interview. The more of these aspects of the process you can master, the greater your chances of securing an offer will be.

Prerequisites: Master Interview Etiquette

Begin by mastering the basics. Employers and individual interviewers are not all looking for the same qualities in their applicants, but interview etiquette is always a baseline expectation. Proper etiquette will not get you hired, but poor etiquette can immediately eliminate you from consideration. More importantly, mastering interview etiquette will give you confidence and allow you to focus on the more substantive parts of the interview process.

So, in your communications with the employer's office prior to the interview, always be courteous, clear, and concise. Respond promptly to any voice messages or email communications from your interviewer's office. Dress appropriately for the interview (usually in conservative business formal attire that is clean and well pressed). Treat everyone in your interviewer's office with respect and professionalism; it is not uncommon for interviewers to ask their receptionists or assistants for their impressions of an applicant. And, should your interview take place over coffee or a meal, make sure you have a good grasp of table manners.

At the end of your interview, thank your interviewer for her time. Then, make sure to send a thank-you note within the next 24 hours to anybody who interviewed you. Your thank-you note, like all of your other communications with the interviewer's office, should be courteous, clear, and concise—and should communicate your continuing enthusiasm for the position for which you applied. A couple of well-chosen sentences are sufficient. Many examples of proper post-interview thank-you notes are available online, but your note should always be personalized with a specific callback to your interview to reinforce the positive interactions you had with your interviewer. In most cases it is acceptable to send a thank-you email directly to your interviewer, but if your interviewer is particularly conservative or advanced in years, you should send a handwritten note.

Confident in your mastery of etiquette, you may now focus on the core of your interview: demonstrating to your interviewer that your substantive skills and personality traits match with the employer's needs and wants.

The Core of the Interview, Part I: Know Yourself, Like Yourself

The success of your interview hinges on your ability to "sell yourself" to the interviewer. A successful sales pitch usually requires knowing and loving the product—in this case, you. Because your interviewer usually will not know much about you at the beginning of the interview, it is commonplace for legal interviews to involve a series of probing questions about the line items in your résumé. So, before your interview, examine each item in your résumé, and with respect to each one, make sure you can thoroughly answer two questions:

- First, at a basic level, what does the line item *mean*? If you've listed a prior job on your résumé, what specific responsibilities did that job entail? If you've listed a thesis, what *specifically* was your thesis and what did you have to do to write it? If you've included a personal hobby on your résumé, what is involved in practicing that hobby? Don't just answer these questions in the abstract—come up with a specific story and example to illustrate your points. You would be surprised by how many interview candidates cannot provide a compelling description of the experiences and qualifications listed in their own résumés. Don't be one of those people. We don't offer them jobs.
- Second, what message does this line item send to your interviewer that will
 make them want to hire you? What skills did you learn at that job that will
 translate well to the position for which you are interviewing? What stories can

you tell about your experience there that will demonstrate your competence, work ethic, maturity, or another positive trait to your interviewer? Be able to illustrate how difficult it was to earn that honor or award you've listed on your résumé. With respect to the "personal interests" portion of your résumé, how does what you've listed reveal about your individual personality, demonstrate a quality or skill that you otherwise would not be able to talk about in your interview, and/or provide an opportunity for you to bond with your interviewer? If you have difficulty articulating why a particular line item makes you a stronger candidate, consider removing that item from your résumé in the future.

If you do a thorough job of answering these two questions for everything in your résumé, you will have most of the raw material you need to answer any questions you are likely to receive in an interview. You will of course be able to articulately and concisely answer factual questions about your skills and experience. But you will also have the specific points and examples needed to *compellingly* answer more abstract questions you are likely to receive, such as:

- Why do you want to work for us?
- How would you describe your work style?
- Even a dreaded "behavioral" prompt like "Describe a time when you failed and your reaction to that failure."

To craft a good answer to questions like these requires you to highlight *specific examples* from your past that *show* that the otherwise abstract qualities you are describing—e.g., your enthusiasm for the sought-after position, your compatibility with the employer's work culture, or your maturity and resilience—are genuine.

In addition to knowing yourself, you must like yourself. You must *believe* that you have something valuable offer the employer. And you do! You have accomplished a lot just to make it this far. You may not attend an elite law school, or be at the top of your class, or have a prestigious internship to your name, but you have some experience and unique strengths. If given the chance, you could succeed working for this employer. Reflect on that, internalize it, and let it shine through in when you are answering questions about your skills and experience. The ability to authentically project confidence is the most important asset you can bring to an interview.

The Core of the Interview, Part II: Know Your Target

Knowing (and liking) yourself is only half the battle. You also have to know your target. This is true on an organizational level—you should know the organization to which you have applied—and on a personal level—you should know about the individual who is interviewing you.

With respect to the former, learn about the employer before your interview. Study its website, including any recent press releases. Review Chambers reports, and any other informational resources available through your law school's library or career center. If possible, talk to someone who works there. Your goal is to understand the organization's mission, the work that it does, its place in the industry, and its culture.

It will benefit you greatly to learn these things in advance of your interview. First, as a threshold matter it will help you to determine whether you really want to work for the employer. Assuming you do, knowing the organization well will help you to convey genuine enthusiasm for the opportunity during the interview.

Second, knowing the organization will help you to show your interviewer that you have done your research and are serious about the opportunity, and to avoid certain embarrassing mistakes, like not knowing basic facts about the organization available through its webpage. Many years ago, one of the authors made this mistake, telling an interviewer from a corporate transactions boutique of his desire to become a commercial litigator. Needless to say, he did not even get a call-back interview.

Third, and most importantly, studying the employer will provide insight into which aspects of yourself to highlight during your interview. For example, if the employer prides itself on its "entrepreneurial culture," you know to emphasize your entrepreneurial spirit, and to identify specific examples of your entrepreneurialism beforehand so that you are prepared to relay them during your interview. A related point is that knowledge of the organization is necessary to allow you to ask the right questions of your interviewer—namely, questions that will provide you with useful information about the employer, demonstrate qualities that will be appealing to your interviewer, or provide the interviewer with the opportunity to tell you about features of the employer that you know she is eager to advertise.

In addition to knowing the employer, you should learn something about your interviewer, if you are able to know in advance the individual who is likely to interview you. To the greatest extent possible, learn about her education, experience, practice, and role in the organization before your interview. This provides all the same advantages

listed above, and also provides you with the best chance of creating a genuine bond with your interviewer. Realize that your interviewer is selecting the person she will most enjoy working with in the future. Your interviewer wants to hire someone who will do good work, yes, but also someone who is enjoyable to be around. Interviewers tend to hire people who they want to be friends with, or who somehow remind them of themselves. Use these facts to your advantage.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Projecting confidence during your interview is crucial. Practice is the best way to develop confidence. Practice interviews will allow you polish your responses to common interview questions and learn to improvise effective responses to unconventional questions. They may also allow you to discover aspects of your personal presentation of which you are not aware—for instance, weak body language or verbal tics—and improve on them. Another benefit is that if you practice with a classmate and alternate in posing questions to each other, you will get to sit in the position of the interviewer. This will give you a better understanding of the types of responses that are compelling to an interviewer and the types that are not.

Take advantage of any practice interview programs offered by your law school's career services office, and practice interviewing with your fellow classmates. You can even practice alone by filming yourself while you answer practice questions. Put in the time to hone your responses and demeanor, and by the time you are in a real interview you will feel prepared, poised and confident.

Keep Your Head Up

Nearly every 2L in the country will be searching for a summer position at the same time that you are. Even for qualified law students who interview well, rejection is the rule rather than the exception. The application process can be a numbers game. So, maximize your chances for success by following the advice in this article, but when rejection comes—and it will come—try not to take it personally. Keep your head up and keep putting in the work and you will eventually succeed. Remember, you will have many opportunities, but you only need to secure one 2L position that is right for you.

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Top Tips for Call-Backs

How do you distinguish yourself during the coveted call-back interview? Perkins Coie shares its top 10 tips.

Gain perspective from:

Michael Gotham, Director of Recruiting & Retention, oversees law student and lateral attorney recruiting, new attorney orientation and integration, associate evaluation and compensation, and other attorney personnel matters. Michael is also a former president of the National Association for Law Placement.

Cori Moore is a partner in the firm's Litigation group and Hiring Partner in the Seattle office. She focuses her practice on complex commercial litigation, including representing clients in various industries in contract, consumer protection, antitrust, trade secret, business tort and class action matters. Cori has also conducted internal corporate investigations involving allegations of employee misconduct and fraud.

Top 10 Tips for Call-Backs

- 1. Be knowledgeable about the employer and the job. We see so many candidates who are unable to articulate why they are interested in our firm or demonstrate any awareness of what it is we do. It's important to know about the firm, the nature of its practice and clients. What are the areas of practice? Why interest in those areas and what makes you a good fit? Many employers do not expect students to have a clear vision of the practice area they will pursue for their entire career, but it's important that you demonstrate that you have thought about the job, what the work will be, and why you are interested in it and will enjoy it.
- 2. Be prepared for any question. Interviewers will run the gamut in the topics they will want to talk about in an interview. The best interviewers will ask focused questions about particular experiences you've had that are relevant to the job. They might ask about legal internships (legal experience), or a senior thesis (writing ability) or extracurricular activities (community service or leadership). They might ask more general questions that will require you to draw on your experiences to answer, e.g., "Tell me about a challenging situation you've had leading a group and how you overcame it." You should be prepared to talk about everything on your resume and the experiences, skills and knowledge relevant to the job. Be prepared to tell the interviewers about times you have performed leadership roles, managed other people, faced and overcome challenges in your personal or professional lives, balanced a lot of plates in the air -- all of these are the kinds of skills that serve you well in a large law firm environment.
- 3. Ask good questions. Good questions are those that are important to you (i.e., you really want to know the answer) and that you could not answer for yourself with a bit of effort. Don't ask questions about information that is on the employer's website. Also, be sure to ask the right questions of the right people. For example, if you want to know more about what you might do on a day-to-day basis in the job, ask the junior attorney on your schedule who probably does the same work or at least did it in recent memory. Questions for the senior attorneys might be about the job's role relative to other roles and people in the broader organization.
- 4. Be honest. If you have a bad grade or a situation in your professional experience that you believe requires further explanation, be honest, upfront and positive about it. You should be prepared to describe what happened, the reason for it and how you've moved on or improved. People appreciate the honesty and often know if you are being evasive or telling a half-truth.
- 5. Be yourself. It's important that you allow your personality to shine through during an interview. Of course you should be professional, but being professional does not mean you should be overly formal, stiff and flat. Show your enthusiasm for the job. It may be difficult when you're nervous, but try to treat the interview as a conversation rather than a deposition or an interrogation. Interviewers are typically "people" people; they like meeting students and will be genuinely interested in learning more about you. Finally, remember to keep your energy up even at the end of a long series of interviews.
- 6. Don't be a jerk. Perkins Coie has a no jerks hiring philosophy. You may be first in your law school class, editor of the law review and the recipient of a perfect score on your LSAT—but if you are rude to interviewers, assistants or staff that you encounter during your call back interview, you will not be invited to return.

- 7. Look the part. A professional appearance is important and contributes in large part to a positive (or negative) first impression. Appropriate dress will help you present yourself in the best way you can. If you have any questions about appropriate interview attire, ask your career services professionals for their candid opinion.
- 8. Practice. Do a mock interview. And do one with someone who has experience interviewing a lot of people, like an advisor in your career services office or an attorney mentor who regularly interviews candidates. And, when the mock interview is done, ask for candid and honest advice. You can't fix something if no one will tell you it's not right -- and you don't want to be told it's not right after your interviews are over.
- 9. Proofread your resume, thank you letters or emails before sending. Candidates have been dinged for typos in thank you letters. It shows carelessness and inattention to detail. It would be better not to send a thank you at all.
- 0. Review your social media footprint. Google your name and search for yourself on the various social media outlets to see your social media image. Make sure that your personal information -- including pictures, postings and other communications -- is not public and available for an employer to find, or any information that is public is appropriate for an employer to see. You never know who may do a search for your name on the internet. If there is any need for damage control, do it sooner rather than later.

10 Things They Don't Teach You in Law School (But Should)

Written by Jeena Cho

One of my first projects as a lawyer was to draft a Motion to Shorten Time.

I panicked. This was definitely not covered in law school. In hindsight, I should've asked for more instructions but, not wanting to look foolish, I left the partner's office without asking a single question.

It took me over a week to draft the motion. After a lot of research and cramming I finally figured out what Motion to Shorten Time was, how it worked, and the applicable rules. When I handed it to him, he smiled and said, "it's called motion to shorten time."

Law school prepares you for a lot, but there's plenty more to do with the actual practice of law that law school just doesn't cover.

Here are some other things that schools should teach young lawyers about in law school—and that you should be learning about yourself in the meantime.

1. How to listen

In law school, students are trained to listen in order to run legal analysis—they gather the relevant facts, figure out the applicable rules, and use them to analyze those facts. They're also taught to listen so they can respond or react as is necessary, for example, during an oral argument.

What they are not taught is to listen so that our clients feel truly heard and understood.

Often, when a client comes to see you, it's probably the first time she's ever shared her story with anyone. This was certainly true for my practice in consumer bankruptcy. The clients were deeply distressed and full of raw emotions. Many felt angry at themselves, their ex-business partners, their spouse, or at the world.

What I learned was that if I moved too quickly into "lawyer mode" and started asking detailed questions about the value of their assets, income, and amount of debt, the clients would often freeze. I wasn't building empathy.

The clients deeply wanted to felt, heard, and seen.

Lawyers are in the trauma business. Rarely do clients come to see you with happy news. As lawyers, we need to acknowledge the trauma so that clients feel seen, heard, and understood.

This way of listening is useful in dealing with other people as well, including opposing counsel. Often, when I feel frustrated because she's being unreasonable, I'll notice my own emotional response to the situation. Rather than reacting from this place of anger and frustration, I'll take a curious stance. Sometimes, I'll ask her, "please help me understand your client's position so I can explain it to my client."

2. How to manage the unintended consequences of lawyering

According to a study published by the American Bar Association, 20.6% of lawyers screened positive for hazardous, harmful, and potentially alcohol-dependent drinking. Levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among attorneys were significant, with 28%, 19%, and 23% experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively.

Why? Again, lawyers are in the trauma business, and it affects them too. According to one study, "almost 35 percent of public defenders meet the criteria for [secondary traumatic stress] STS and about 75 percent of those with STS symptoms meet the qualifications for functional impairment."

It's puzzling that despite these well-documented and well-studied consequences of lawyering, lawyers get zero training in law school on this issue.

Therapists who are also in the trauma business receive training on vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, compassion fatigue, burnout, and other unintended consequences that can arise simply because they're doing their job. They also receive training on strategies for avoiding and working with these potential consequences.

About the only "tool" law school offers is happy hour. Small wonder, then, that so many lawyers use alcohol and other substances to manage the stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout that can come with lawyering.

Learning about the unintended consequences of lawyering early on—and creating strategies for avoiding it, including self-care, mindfulness, emotional intelligence—is crucial for a successful legal career.

3. How to nurture creativity

As discussed in this Harvard Business Review article, creativity is the most important skill a leader can have. Yet, "80% of American and British workers feel pressured into being productive rather than creative." This is also true for lawyers.

Creativity is important because it's the foundation for new ideas and solutions. Often, law school kills the creativity and curiosity that law students start 1L with. They stop reading for the fun of it, stop creating art, stop writing fiction pieces, stop dancing, stop doing yoga, etc.

Stare decisis also doesn't help to inspire and spark creativity. You're taught that there's only one correct way to do things—to think in binary terms, and to see each case as a zero sum game.

When you're engaged in a creative process, you can access a state known as "flow," also sometimes known as 'being in the zone.' Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a researcher and author that studies this phenomenon. His book is Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.

In his TED talk, Csikszentmihalyi describes flow in this way:

"There's this focus that, once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of ecstasy, a sense of clarity: you know exactly what you want to do from one moment to the other; you get immediate feedback. You know that what you need to do is possible to do, even though difficult, and sense of time disappears, you forget yourself, you feel part of something larger. And once the conditions are present, what you are doing becomes worth doing for its own sake".

A few years ago, I decided to return to the many hobbies I abandoned. I also picked up some new hobbies.

I started gardening, took beer-making classes, and started sewing and writing. What surprised me was that exercising my creative muscles helped me to think of creative solutions for my clients. Some of my best trial strategies have revealed themselves when I'm engaged in activities that allow me to access flow.

As our legal system becomes ever more complex, as more data and technology becomes available, it's critical for lawyers to stay agile and nimble—and these skills can be cultivated and practiced through creativity.

I spoke with Jack Pringle, information technology attorney and partner at Adams and Reese LLP, about his thoughts on creativity. Here's what he had to say:

"Good lawyering involves finding solutions to difficult problems. The solutions are not immediately apparent, especially in these times of rapid change. Creativity (implementing new ideas based on seeing problems clearly) is crucial for problem-solving lawyers".

4. How to have a difficult conversation

I once had a client whose mother fell suddenly ill during her bankruptcy. If her mother died, leaving the will as-is, the bankruptcy estate would get all the inheritance. I suggested to her that she speak to her mother about changing the will.

The client was understandably upset, not wanting to worry her mother with her financial troubles. She felt ashamed and embarrassed.

I also felt a lot of tension and sadness. Every few days, the client would call, crying, upset, and asking me how she should go about asking her mother to change the will.

I had no easy answers.

As lawyers, you'll likely hear stories you'll never be able to unhear, and see images that you'll never be able to unsee. This also means you may need to have very difficult—and sometimes, unthinkable—conversations with your clients. Learning how to meet your clients in their most vulnerable state, learning to meet their suffering with empathy and compassion—these are cornerstones that will help you manage difficult conversations.

5. When to use alternative methods to help clients

Abraham Maslow said, "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail."

Lawyers are trained to view every situation through the lens of lawyering, but we rarely pause to ask, "is the law an appropriate solution here?" For example, over the years, I've developed working relationships with financial advisors, CPAs, realtors, and therapists. Often, when clients come in to discuss bankruptcy, I recognize that while the client could file, that may not be the best solution.

Sometimes, the client has never learned personal finance skills so it may be more appropriate to refer her out to a financial advisor who can help to set up a budget and help her to repay her loans rather than file for bankruptcy. Other times, the client has been struggling with some type of addiction (e.g., gambling or drinking), which is at the center of his financial issues, so it's more appropriate to send him out to see a therapist.

Having worked for many years in litigation, both as an assistant state attorney and as a civil litigator, I've learned that "winning" a litigation case rarely restores the client whole. Often, they're still bitter because the underlying conflict remains unresolved. The client may still be bitter about the dispute she's had with her business partner or her ex-spouse, for example. In these situations, a little compassion can go a long way. Having local professionals to refer your clients to (e.g., therapists or accountants) can help solve their problems more completely.

6. How (and why) to hone your conflict management skills

In law school, we are taught about the law and how to procedures necessary to navigate the legal system.

What we are not taught about is how to deal with the various personalities—the passive aggressive people, the yellers, the screamers, and the jerks. We're not taught how to manage the discomfort that often accompanies conflict. Unless you're fortunate enough to take a class on negotiations or something similar, there's no training on how to de-escalate a conflict, how to find win-win solutions, or how to understand the needs of the other party.

One criminal defense attorney in my mindfulness course shared that he simply didn't know how to not be a defense attorney at all times. His wife and child would often accuse him of treating

them like clients or a hostile witnesses. We need tools for being able to manage conflicts at work effectively, as well as conflicts that can arise in our personal life.

As noted in a recent report released by the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, "chronic, unmanaged conflict creates physical, psychological, and behavioral stress. Research suggests that conflict management training can reduce the negative stressful effects of conflict and possibly produce better, more productive lawyers."

7. How to be resilient

There's a growing body of research which suggests people have different capacities for bouncing back and surviving life's difficulties and traumas. This ability to bounce back is known as resilience.

Fortunately, research also suggests that resilience is something you can learn—it's not an innate skill.

According to the report mentioned above from the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, factors that can enhance resilience include, optimism, confidence (self-efficacy), effective problem-solving skills, a sense of meaning and purpose, flexible thinking, impulse control, empathy, close relationships and social support, and faith or spirituality.

8. How to run a law practice

Law school teaches students about "the law," but not how to make a living practicing it. There's no class on how to get clients, on networking, or on the business end of running a law practice.

When my husband and I decided to quit our law firm jobs to start our law practice, I was surprised by how little I knew about the business of being a lawyer.

This is unfortunate. As much as lawyers like to think of themselves as professionals that frown upon having a frank conversation about how to build a financially successful practice, the reality is that the only way we'll be able to continue to do our work is if it's sustainable.

Law students would benefit from a foundational understanding of how a business works. Courses could include: accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, and organizational behavior.

9. How to manage your personal finances

This is a topic that I believe should be taught much earlier on in the education system, but it's especially negligent to skip personal finance education in or ahead of law school when young students are borrowing six-figures to finance a J.D.

A few years ago, I was asked to teach a law practice management course at a local law school. The dean thought it was necessary because so many students were opting to start their own law practice out of law school.

We began the semester by talking about personal finance—most importantly, by answering these questions:

- •How are you going to build a sustainable law practice?
- •How much do you need to generate to pay your overhead costs?
- •How much money do you need to survive, and better yet, to thrive?

Surprisingly, very few students had an understanding of how much they would owe at graduation, what their monthly payments would be, or how much they would need to generate to pay them.

More law schools may consider offering courses like this in the future, but until then, law students can take matters into their own hands by taking out books on financial planning or following financial planning and business blogs while in law school.

10. How to nurture an internal sense of success and self-worth

Most lawyers get to where they are because they are high achievers. Often, they're at the top of their class. They're successful, and they are driven.

These external yardsticks can be useful drivers, but when taken to an extreme, they can also can be toxic. When law students become used to looking externally for a sense of self-worth and satisfaction, it can become difficult to create those feelings from within.

I've worked and spoken with so many lawyers who feel as though they're only as good or successful as their last win—they struggle with the sense of constantly failing. This expectation that we be perfect (a pressure which seemingly comes from every direction), in an environment that encourages aggression, can lead to chronic stress for many lawyers.

Dr. Kristin Neff argues that "our competitive culture tells us we need to be special and above average to feel good about ourselves, but we can't all be above average at the same time." She adds, "There is always someone richer, more attractive, or more successful than we are. And even when we do manage to feel self-esteem for one golden moment, we can't hold on to it. Our sense of self-worth bounces around like a ping-pong ball, rising and falling in lock-step with our latest success or failure."

It was a long journey for me to reorient my own internal compass for understanding where my priorities are and for feeling a sense of self-worth. Each and every one of us has an inherent self-worth and value—not because you've won that latest jury verdict, or appeal, but simply because it's your right as a human being to be valued.

Meditate. Take time for self-reflection. Keep a journal of things that went well every day. Whatever it takes, make time to improve your ability to create your sense of self-worth internally. Lawyering is a tough career, and the more you can do to keep yourself resilient, the more successful (and healthy) you'll be in the long term.

Preparing for success as a lawyer means preparing yourself in more ways than one

There's more to being a lawyer than just practicing law. From managing finances, to dealing with the business side of law, to protecting your mental health, there's a lot to consider for young lawyers wanting to set themselves up for long and successful legal careers.

The legal profession is a demanding one, but it is possible to have a balanced life and a fulfilling career—it just takes a bit of personal care and a lot of preparation. The more young lawyers prepare themselves for the multiple facets of a career in the legal industry, the better equipped they'll be to not only help others, but to have rich, healthy professional lives themselves.