



Between Offer and Acceptance

[Chet Olsen]

While the hiring process heavily favors the employer over the employee, once you have received an offer from a firm, the balance of power has shifted. No longer do you have to focus on impressing the firm, you now can sit back and make sure they impress you enough to accept.

If you are like most people, you will be excited when a law firm or other legal employer extends you an offer for a job. Especially if it's your first offer, your only offer, or the offer you were hoping for the most, the inclination is to immediately accept. Even if you are not that excited about the opportunity, you might be inclined to accept immediately because you are afraid it might look bad to the employer if you hesitate. You might even be concerned that the offer will be revoked if you don't jump on it.

While you definitely want to show the same enthusiasm you did during the interviewing process, it is always prudent to take a bit of time to consider what you are about to do. After all, you probably would not commit to marriage after spending a few hours with someone. Yet, most lawyers commit to their law firms without much more thought - even though, in many cases, they will end up spending more time with their law firms than their spouses.

At large law firms, you may be asked to go through one, two or three sets of interviews. Even if you count up all the time spent on a screening interview and the callbacks, that really isn't a lot of time to get to know the firm or its people. While how the firm is doing financially, how it is structured and how prominent its practice is are somewhat quantifiable, it may take more time for you to get a feel for the firm culture/personality and decide if it's the place for you. In many ways and for many people, the work environment is as important, or more important, than how good the firm's lawyers are at practicing law.

Much like a first date, sometimes everything can look positive during the few hours you spend interviewing with a firm. Most law firms make a big effort to impress candidates during the interview process. Lists are kept of lawyers who can be counted on to make a good impression and put the firm's best foot forward. You should be aware, however, that the same firm has other feet that you don't get to meet until after you start working there. Those feet may not smell as sweet.

The important thing to remember is that the firm does not hold all the cards in this process. To a large extent, you are in the driver's seat after an offer has been extended. Having that offer should give you the confidence to collect the additional information you need to make the right decision.

After you get the offer, what can you do to further investigate if this is the workplace for you?

Go Back to the Firm

Once an offer is made, you should feel confident in asking to meet more lawyers from the firm. Inevitably during the interview process, one or more key players in your future career is likely to be unavailable - maybe it's the head of your department or the senior associate who you are like to work with the most. In any case, determine who else you need to know before making a decision.

Call the recruiting coordinator or person who extended the offer and politely explain that you would like to meet these additional

individuals. Ideally, try to get invited to an upcoming social event that will enable you to meet a large number of people and also get a sense of how they interact with each other.

You don't need to limit that request to lawyers. Wouldn't you like to meet the secretary and paralegal you'll be working with on a daily basis? And don't worry about offending these people by asking to meet them. After all, they are curious about you too and they are likely to be flattered you asked for the meeting.

The post-offer meetings you schedule will be different from your interviews. For one thing, you can relax a bit because your offer is already in hand. Perhaps more importantly, the lawyers you speak with are likely to let their hair down a bit and be more candid than they are during a regular interview. For this reason, it might also be a good idea to meet with one or two of the people you interviewed with earlier and have another conversation.

Research

You probably did your pre-interview research on the firm but that same information will be more meaningful after spending some time there and knowing there is a real chance of joining the firm.

Google your employer and maybe a few of its individual lawyers. If you haven't done so before your interview, you can also look the firm up on the Greedy Associates boards.

Personal Contacts



Perhaps the most useful source of information about what a firm is really like is people who have worked there and will speak freely about it. Use your law school and other connections to track down either former employees of the firm or those who are still employed there.

Getting a personal introduction can make a big difference. In this situation, people are more likely to have an off-the-record conversation with you about the realities of working at the firm. In many cases, they are more likely to "tell the whole story" since you have an offer and don't want to mislead someone who is a friend of a friend and someone likely to join the firm.

A current lawyer at the firm can produce truly inside information more useful than anything you could learn elsewhere. The same is true for those who have left the firm. In either case, however, remember that you are only listening to one person's opinion and different people will have had different experiences.

If you have used a legal recruiter to get this far, you should still be able to rely on his or her counsel during this part of the hiring process. Good recruiters will know a great deal about the firms they work with and should be willing to share the good and the bad. Recruiters can also be an excellent source for putting you in touch with someone who has worked with your potential future employer.

If you use all the resources available to you, it is likely you will hear many personal perspectives on a law firm. You will also hear certain things repeated from different sources and these common experiences should be what you factor into your decision, as they are most likely to impact you. Hopefully, what you hear will make you even more enthusiastic about accepting that offer. Otherwise, there are other firms out there who might offer a better fit for you.