



Interviewing Preparation for In-house Counsel Jobs

[By Stony Olsen]

Recently, one of the leading in-house counsel publishers gave some advice to general counsels on how to conduct effective job interviews. This advice was given to those who are hiring new in-house counsel — i.e., interviewers.

So I'd like to discuss that publisher's points and use them to show you how job applicants can prepare for interviews.

Company Profile

The publisher's first suggestion was for the firm to send a given candidate a profile of the company and law department before the interview. Many companies will do this; many won't. Why is this important? Because the more you know about the company and the legal department there before you go, the more prepared you are.

Companies are impressed by people who obviously have put in a lot of preparation for an interview. If you are willing to learn this much about them, then you will be willing to work hard for them, too. This holds true even if the company doesn't send you a profile.

Lesson one: Learn all you can about the company and legal department.

Length of Interview

The publisher's second piece of advice was to allow enough time to do a relaxed interview — at least 30 minutes, but no more than 45.

This is important. What, exactly, are you as the job applicant going to be talking about for a half hour to an hour? Your Resume, why you want the job, your skills — all of these things will be gone over. But the point about a relaxed interview is also crucial. As a job applicant, you will be nervous, but don't be fearful. Remember, if you are prepared, you shall not fear — not much, anyway.

Preparation can be the difference between a relaxed, confident, skilled applicant and a nervous, in-over-your-head candidate who will be quickly passed over.

Lesson Two: Be prepared to talk for a while, and relax!

Prepared Questions

The third recommendation was to have a set of prepared questions, and the fourth recommendation was to ask each interviewee the same set of questions.



You as the applicant are competing with others. So many of the questions you will be asked are the same ones everyone else has to answer, too. You are being judged on your replies in comparison to theirs. If it is early in the process (you are one of the first interviews), it helps if your answers are the guides everyone else is measured by.

But this means that the interviewer will be looking for something. If you can figure it out in the beginning, you can tailor yourself to the interview better. Some questions are easy to anticipate. Resume, grades, previous jobs, why you want to work there — all are no-brainers. Other questions aren't, though. What about diversity-related queries or other out-of-left-field questions? Try to anticipate, but

again, if you are prepared, then oddball questions won't leave you stammering. Another thing mentioned was that most questions should be open-ended questions — so expect that! They want to see what you are like.

Lesson: Remember that you are being measured against others and that the questions will reflect that.

Lots of Talking

The fifth recommendation was to let the candidate do most of the talking — about 80 percent.

That's a lot of talking, so be prepared to be expected to answer. You can't expect to just give one sentence answers most of the time — you'll need to expand on your answers.

Lesson: Be prepared to answer at length.

Other Points

Another thing worth mentioning is chemistry. It's not your qualifications that are the only concern. Most companies would rather have a less qualified person they can work with than a real pain. The interview will look for "can this person fit into our company?" at least as much as your answers to the questions. They already know your qualifications from your resume. Now they want to know if they can work with you.

The biggest lesson of all is to be prepared and be personable. With those two points in mind, you will do quite well in the interview.