

INTERVIEW SUCCESS TIPS

5 ways to make yourself stand out as a candidate during an interview .

These five tips are likely to help you regardless of the legal sector role you are applying for – and the principles are relevant to any position.

One

Tell me about yourself

The best answer to this question is to quite simply tell the interviewer(s) how your education, experience and skills relate to the position on offer.

Education

Tell them about your education, and in particular highlight your achievements – which are relevant to the role.

Example – Legal Secretary: “I trained as a legal secretary by taking 10 core courses at Pitman Training in 2012.”

Example – Fee Earner (applying for property role): “I am a law graduate from Lincoln University – I achieved a 2:1; I then studied for the LPC in Cambridge and achieved a distinction overall – in the residential and commercial property modules I achieved distinction.”

Experience

Highlight your career achievements – which are aligned to the position you've applied for.

Example – Legal Secretary: “I am working as a conveyancing legal secretary. I assist two fee earners and typical duties include providing quotations, completing searches, typing letters from digital dictation using a CASE management system, dealing with exchanges and post completion.”

Example: “I started working at Example Law Firm in September 2007; since then I have progressed to becoming an associate with a billing target of £x (which I am currently on track to exceed). I have developed relationships with local work referrers such as estate agents and developers, to such an extent that the majority of my work comes from word-of-mouth referrals and relationships I have developed from scratch. I enjoy marketing and business development activities.

Skills

Highlight all of your skills.

Example – Legal Secretary: “I am able to type quickly (80wpm) and accurately; I am used to transcribing from digital dictation and using a CASE management system. I have excellent Microsoft Word and Outlook knowledge – for example I am familiar with formatting documents.”

Example: “The skills I possess and which I think you will benefit from include being able to manage my own caseload; I have supervised trainee solicitors and I enjoy most aspects of my work and the challenges I face on a day-to-day basis. I write articles for my firm's website and run seminars for my clients and potential clients. I get on well with all members of my team.”

Two

Why do you want to leave your current position?

Have an answer to this ready – if relevant. Think about how it would sound if you were interviewing. Good answers include: for the quality or type of work on offer, to cut a commute, to return to the area where your family is.

Three

Understand a competency-based interview

A competency based interview consists of a set of questions designed (usually from a set criteria – such as a person specification or competency framework) to test particular knowledge/skills you may have. The interviewer(s) is looking for evidence that you meet particular prerequisites – these may relate to individual, managerial or motivational attributes.

Example: on the job specification it says a desirable attribute is “the ability to meet and exceed personal targets”

A likely question is therefore: “can you give me an example of when you have demonstrated your ability to meet and exceed a target in a work context?” Remember the four-stop STAR approach when answering such questions:

- Describe the **Situation**
- Describe the **Task** required
- Describe the **Action** you took
- Describe the **Result** of that action

Your answers should refer to “I” and not “we” as much as possible – skilled interviewers are looking for evidence of what you have done in the past to assess what you can do in the future – and therefore your suitability to join their firm.

You can anticipate what questions will arise by reading through the person specification and or competency framework. It's a good idea to spend a few hours writing out likely interview questions and practising answers using the STAR technique.

Four

Answering questions on strengths & weaknesses

Examples of strengths

Some good examples:

- “I think one of my greatest strengths is my ability to write up a plan and deliver on it. I sit down with my clients and take time to fully understand their situation; together we agree objectives so that my client knows exactly what to expect from me, how much it will cost, and when key milestones have been achieved.”

- “I have a keen desire to learn. I make sure I stay up to date with changing legislation and the wider context; I read around my subject after work in my own time. I also write articles and press releases on my subject matter for general and targeted distribution.”
- “I feel just as comfortable advising my client on the phone as I do standing up and doing advocacy.”

Examples of weaknesses

The best examples here are where weakness are genuine – but can be turned around – look at these examples:

- “One of my weaknesses is that I am bored easily. I am therefore looking for a position which is challenging. The job specification provided for this position shows it is a very varied role, and you've said it's a busy role – so I am genuinely interested in the role.”
- “As a fast typist, I can type too quickly and occasionally miss out a word to make a sentence incorrect. Because of this, I make sure I re-read my work twice to check that it is accurate before passing it onto the relevant partner.”

Five

Your questions – key to making the process genuinely two way

Towards the end of the interview, it is likely you will be asked if you have any questions. Your goal here is to understand as much about the role, and the opportunity as you can – to see if the opportunity is genuinely something that you would like and enjoy.

We recommend you sit down and think carefully about some good questions to ask – which demonstrate that you're interested in the role, and help you to establish whether it is a move you would like to make.

Some examples of questions include:

- “Supposing I am successful and you offer me the role. What would you expect of me as a new employee within the first 3-6 months?”
- “What sort of targets and performance measures are in place here (if any) that I would be required to work to?”
- “In the long term, I have the desire to progress when I am suitably experienced; is this something that can happen here?”

- “Who else works in this office? Is it possible for me to meet them prior to joining if applicable?”

And finally. We always advise that you do not ask HR related questions, or questions related to you as an individual – for example, asking what the salary or benefits package is; asking about time-off policies.

We always advise never to be negative about your previous experience at another law firm (or in-house legal team). Even if you worked with a very difficult boss or colleague – it's not a good idea to publicise it to a potential new employer. Instead, concentrate on what you can bring in terms of your experience and otherwise.

If you are successful, you can go on to negotiate a package (this is normally relevant for fee earning roles, where you have significant post qualified experience).