

## Interviewing the Employer

By Mary Waldron

Of course job candidates are supposed to let employers take the lead during job interviews, but it's also very important to have some questions of your own prepared when the employer utters the fateful line "Do *you* have any questions?"

It's never a good idea to go into job interviews blind; we all know that. In addition to doing your homework on the firm, it's also a good idea to think of more practical questions about the environment and job duties and the position in general. Many times, job applicants jump into jobs simply because they seem glamorous or sought-after without even considering some of the major issues.

Like I said, do your homework on the firm first and foremost. Google the firm. Read any pertinent reviews or articles. Find the firm's homepage and browse around to get a feel for the firm's personality and attitude. Learn the names of the partners and other key players. If the opportunity arises during the interview, you will be loaded with information to impress the employer. However, if the firm's basic 411 doesn't come up in conversation, don't start rambling on about how impressive their recent victory was and what an amazing prosecutor so and so is. It will just sound like you're saying, "Hi, I studied your website and memorized all the facts. See how prepared I

am?" That only brings one word to my mind: ego. There's no room for that at the associate level—at least in my opinion.

Now, vacuuming up all the firm's details into your head is not all you should be doing. Preparing other meaningful conversation starters and questions will also determine your make-or-break potential.

I hate it when job applicants just sit there, nod, and agree with everything I say. That's just playing it too safe. In addition to making you blend in with the sea of candidates, it also masks any hint of your personality, which will never help you...unless you're a complete jerk.

Think about the office's atmosphere and what suits you. Ask about the work environment and the group dynamic. Does everyone joke around and talk, or do they all escape into their own little worlds during the workday?

Ask questions about what your job would entail. Have the employer explain what types of projects and cases you would be focusing on. Once he or she lays out a description of the job and what it involves, you can throw out all the ways in which you fit that job. It's really just a slick way to promote yourself.

For example, if an employer says you would handle more of the estate planning cases, you can say something like, "Oh, that would be good because I interned at a wills and estate planning firm during my last semester in law school." Once the employer gives you the green light, you can just cruise into ways to tie yourself to the job. Just make sure what you tell them is true. Use what they tell you to tailor yourself and your experience to the position.

Don't be afraid to raise these types of issues and questions. It will communicate that you're interested in the job and eager to bring all you can to the mix. You won't be that annoying serial question-asker until you start asking redundant and irrelevant questions. But above all, know yourself, and know where you should draw the line with certain lines of questioning.

You can even call ahead to ask a current employee (who is not the interviewer) about his or her opinion of the firm and his or her particular experience. A quick five-minute assessment of the job will suffice. The following questions are all good ones to ask:

- How long have you been with the firm?
- How long do you envision yourself staying at this firm?
- What is the work environment like?
- Do you feel you are fully compensated for the level and amount of work you do?

Asking a current employee about these issues will help you create questions to ask during the interview.

There is, however, one huge question that you should save until the end of the last interview: "What would my salary be, and when would I be eligible for a raise?" Although the answer to that question can make or break an opportunity, don't worry about salary concerns until they really matter. You don't want to come off as a money-grubber! In some cases, I would actually wait until the job is offered; that way, the employer is already in love with you, meaning he or she will be more willing to negotiate if need be.