SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW STRATEGIES
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Job interviews can be stressful for many professionals, no matter how strong their skills or experience. And corporate attorneys are no exception. Regardless of the number of times lawyers have questioned individuals in the course of their daily responsibilities or responded to questioning themselves, this relatively short meeting that stands between them and attaining a new position puts their communication abilities to the test like few other situations can. As a result, it is prudent for attorneys seeking a career transition to revisit the fundamental principles of navigating a successful interview – especially if a significant amount of time has passed since their last job search.

The goal is to use the interview to learn as much as possible about a prospective job, communicate relevant experience and accomplishments as an in-house counsel, and detail what can be offered to a new employer. Following are some of the basic steps toward a winning interview.

Preparing for the interview
Preparation is essential if attorneys expect to remain calm under the pressure of job interviewing, and it’s the first step toward a successful outcome. Here are some suggestions:

Researching the prospective employer. Lawyers should attempt to learn as much as they can about the company through the Internet or professional contacts, including pertinent facts about the organization’s history, products or services, management style and corporate culture, as well as details about its corporate legal department. Knowing this will help them provide answers during the interview that specifically address the company’s needs. Attorneys need to find out who will be conducting the interview, including name, title, current responsibilities and experience. They should also try to determine why the company is interested in their qualifications.

Rehearsing answers to tough questions. Every prospective employer approaches an interview with three central concerns:

- Is the candidate qualified to do the job?
- Will the candidate fit in?
- Does the candidate want the job?

Questions relating to these issues will always be asked and will serve as a springboard for conversation, encouraging additional discussion and queries. It’s smart for attorneys to develop concise yet informative responses in advance that detail situations at previous jobs where they capitalized on their abilities to add value to a company and department.
One of the most effective ways to develop articulate, quality answers is to rehearse them on videotape or in front of willing friends. Reviewing and critiquing responses will indicate areas to improve, increase confidence and facilitate getting to the point more quickly during the interview.

Some questions attorneys will likely be asked include:

- **Tell me about yourself.** Lawyers should prepare a 15 to 30 second “sound bite” that describes their professional achievements and qualifications in two or three sentences – how cases and matters were handled, working with outside counsel and managing project teams, for example. This should also include a brief description of attributes that can be brought to the position.

- **Tell me about your career.** This is an excellent opportunity to explain what’s made an attorney effective in his or her work, the range of talents offered and why the job is being pursued.

- **What are your major accomplishments and/or strengths?** The response should review several projects handled that demonstrate an aptitude for the job. For example, attorneys interviewing for a position in a technology company might discuss their roles in producing software licensing agreements or overseeing negotiations on key contracts.

- **What are your weaknesses?** Answering this question is always difficult. It’s best to be honest by addressing a skill that one has begun to develop but would like to make even better. For example, an attorney could mention several areas they are working on and that they would like to improve – such as management, computer or organizational skills – and that they welcome the opportunity to develop more of these abilities in a new position.

  Two traps to avoid: overstating a lack of knowledge in a particular area or proclaiming to have no weaknesses. The first answer isn’t necessary. The second isn’t honest.

- **What interests you about our company and corporate legal department?** Here’s where research can pay off. Lawyers can discuss the company’s business, why they would like to work there and how their qualifications are a match with the company’s needs. They can also discuss how they might contribute specifically to the legal department and communicate their willingness to take on new challenges and assignments.

**Developing questions about the company**

It’s also important for job-seeking attorneys to be ready to ask a few questions of their own – this will give them an opportunity to further convey their interest in the job. Examples include asking about industry outlook, the company’s long-range plans, and the growth potential of the targeted in-house position. Other questions might delve into plans to expand the legal department as the company grows or whether a candidate would be allowed to grow in the job and eventually move into a position with new and greater responsibilities. It is generally unwise to inquire about vacation time, benefits or office arrangements until serious interest has been expressed in an individual. Insightful questions, however, help both employer and job seeker determine whether there is a good “fit” with the company.