

LEGAL CAREER ADVICE: AVOID THESE 5 INTERVIEW DEAL BREAKERS

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You have an enviable legal career, and you possess the [in-demand skills](#) and major credentials for most legal jobs. You've been invited to several job interviews, yet you have not secured a job offer. What could be the problem?

One possibility: you may be sabotaging your job search by committing one or more of the deadly initial interview sins. To improve your odds of landing a new role and moving up the ladder, we offer a refresher on what hiring managers are looking out for and five tips for avoiding the most common legal career interview deal breakers.

1. Failing to dress the part. Even though many businesses have adopted casual dress codes, law firms and corporate legal departments remain conservative when it comes to workplace attire, especially at the interview stage. You want to convey respect, decorum, neatness, comfort and commitment to your legal career, so choose your [interview attire](#) carefully.

- Men and women both should wear crisp, classic, well-fitting suits.
- Have your interview outfit professionally pressed (or do it yourself, so long as it looks good).
- Mind hemlines on pants and skirts. Don't go too short on skirts or necklines and don't allow your pant legs to drag. The pant leg should break forming a gentle V-shape above the dress shoe.
- Avoid loud colors, wild patterns and busy prints, though a tastefully interesting tie or scarf can help you stand out in a good way.
- Jewelry and makeup should be conservative; avoid wearing strong cologne.
- If you're concerned about unexpected spills, carry an instant stain remover.
- Do a quick check in the restroom mirror at the interview site to confirm you look your professional best.

2. Failing to do your homework. Before every interview, you should take time to [research the potential employer](#). Find out everything you can: their history, client base, practice areas, who's who among senior management, pro bono work, awards and recognitions, and so forth. For the latest news and happenings, enter their name and click the News button on your favorite search engine. Also check out what others have to say about working for the company on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Glassdoor.

This background information will help you speak intelligently during the interview. If you happen to know someone who works for the company, contact them and if they reply, ask about the company culture,

management style and general employee satisfaction — including if they themselves are happy, and why or why not?

3. Being caught off guard by unexpected questions. Your prospects will lessen if you respond to an interview question with only a few words or stammer your way through it. Although you don't know exactly what interviewers will ask, you *can* rehearse answers to [common interview questions](#). Hiring managers are looking for more than just what you know; they also want to see what kind of [communicator](#) you are.

- To land legal jobs, you need to *prepare, prepare, prepare* before the big day.
- Do a mock job interview (or Q&A) with a friend who knows your background, has read the job posting and is familiar with the company's mission.
- Ask your friend to throw in some [off-the-wall questions](#) to see how well you respond on your feet.
- After the mock interview, ask for feedback on not only content, but also on delivery. Did you maintain positive eye contact? How was your body language? Did you avoid verbal fillers like “you know,” “umm” and “like”?

The more you practice, the smoother your delivery will be during the actual interview.

4. Failing to ask questions of your own. Near the end of the interview, many hiring managers will ask whether you have questions about the position. This is the time to leave them with final impressions about your initiative, inquisitiveness and fit for the role, so take full advantage of the opportunity.

Come to the interview with a few questions that demonstrate your sincere interest in the position and desire to help the company achieve its goals. Asking about the specific position and [office culture are a start](#). Here are a few other suggestions for delving deeper:

- What will I be expected to do on my first day, 30th day and 90th day? What does a typical day look like for the professional in this role?
- Does this person work independently or in a team setting?
- Please describe the organization's management style.
- What is the in-house legal career trajectory for this role?
- Does the firm offer a [mentorship program](#)?
- What sort of training or professional development does the company offer?

5. Rushing ahead to a foregone conclusion. During the initial stage of the hiring process, it's important for you to keep your focus on impressing the hiring manager (or hiring panel) and not worrying about details you can delve into once they make you an offer. The first interview is *not* the time to ask about extra vacation days, raises, remote work options, etc. Those are topics you can bring up once you know you're their lead candidate. At that point, you'll be in the catbird's seat.

Sometimes it's hard to know what an employer is looking for in a new hire. However, you increase your odds of landing legal jobs and boosting your legal career when you avoid deal-breaking mistakes during that crucial first interview.

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