

HR FEATURE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

6 Steps for Leading a Successful Interview

Today, finding and hiring employees takes much more time and effort than it ever used to in the past. According to Money, candidates can expect to find a new position in about 43 days, but that number jumps up to 76 days if there's a "vice president" or "director" in the job title.



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Finding a new hire is complicated, so your law firm should follow best practices in order to hire the most qualified candidate in the most efficient manner possible. This will save you time and energy while ensuring that the future of your law firm is in good, capable hands.

When you're looking for a new hire, here are some best practices for interviewing to follow throughout the process.

1. PLAN QUESTIONS AHEAD OF TIME

Preparing for an interview with a candidate means reviewing their résumé and planning out the questions ahead of time. According to Sharon Meit Abrahams, PhD, President of Legal Talent Advisors, LLC, you should never improvise during the interview.

“By planning the questions ahead of time, the interviewer can ask specific questions related to items on the résumé,” she says. “It is critical to delve into job responsibilities and outcomes of the work they have performed for previous employers. Using behavioral interviewing techniques has proven to be a good practice.”

While it may seem like a logical idea to go off a candidate’s feedback and ask questions based on what they say, it can lead to unequal interviews, cautions Ken Eulo, Founding Partner at Smith & Eulo Law Firm. “All candidates should have the same interview questions, and only those questions, to ensure that they can be fairly evaluated and compared.”

2. DO A PRE-INTERVIEW

Before inviting a candidate into the office, it’s best to ask a few questions over the phone to see if they’re what you’re looking for. Brent Morgan, an attorney at The Morgan Law Office, says he asks candidates what their salary expectations are, what hours they expect to work and, if they’re not local, whether they have any concerns about commuting. “If nothing troubling comes up, I’ll interview them.”

3. USE A LATERAL PARTNER QUESTIONNAIRE

If you’re recruiting a lateral partner, you should send them a Lateral Partner Questionnaire (LPQ) to fill out, according to Michael Ellenhorn, Founder and Chief Executive Office of Decipher. “Every prospective partner hire puts the firm’s reputation and culture on the line. By taking a closer look at a candidate’s background before beginning the firm’s formal interview process, law firms will put themselves in a much stronger position to avoid what can be catastrophic hiring decisions.”

A detailed questionnaire will often include more than 50 questions and seek information like a candidate’s biographical data, business/financial data, client data, potential conflicts, and professional and personal references. “However, it is the final section, often titled ‘other information,’ where questions regarding malpractice claims, lawsuits, outside interests and other claims may appear,” says Ellenhorn. “It is this section that represents the greatest risk to a law firm, as most of these questions pertain not only to legal risk but potential reputational and operational risk for the firm.”

By giving the candidate the LPQ and reviewing it before the interview, you can rest assured that they won’t cause any issues for your firm when you hire them.

4. ASK THE STANDARD QUESTIONS

Some standard questions can’t be avoided in a law firm interview. According to Morgan, it’s best to ask questions like: “Why do you want to work in a law firm?” “What did you do in your prior jobs that could apply to this position?” “Where do you see yourself in five years?” and “Can you give me a difficult task you had at a previous job and how you dealt with it?”

5. INQUIRE ABOUT HANDLING POTENTIAL SCENARIOS

Since working in a law firm office can be demanding, you want to find out how candidates will think on their feet given a number of different situations. During the interview, pose some scenarios to applicants and ask how they would handle them, suggests Morgan.

“Most candidates are not prepared for this type of question, especially ones who have not previously worked in a law firm. In a lot of cases, they will talk out their thought process as they try to decide how to handle the situation I have given them. It gives me insight as to how they would handle unexpected situations.”

6. LOOK FOR APPEALING QUALITIES

During and after the interview, pinpoint what appealing qualities you found in the candidate. Jasmine Daya, a lawyer and Managing Principal of Jasmine Daya & Co., says she seeks out candidates who are not just qualified but also demonstrate a strong willingness and desire to work hard.

“Positive energy, commitment to the firm and a team-player approach are the attributes that I am looking for,” says Daya. “I want the people that work at my firm to enjoy coming to work and enjoy the company of the people they work with. I want them to respect each other and know that they have each other’s backs, which, at a litigation firm, is so important given the fast-paced and often stressful environment.”

Steven Dorfman, Managing Attorney at The Peregman Firm, P.L.L.C., says that when interviewing attorneys, he and his team will look for candidates who are charismatic, passionate and smart. They'll see if the candidate is a proficient communicator; what sort of impression they give off to potential coworkers, co-counsel, clients and the court; and if they seem earnest or sincere.

"There's nothing that turns an interviewer off more than a candidate [who] tries too hard to impress," Dorfman says. "In my opinion, such candidates tend to overextend themselves during an interview and start to espouse opinions on topics that they are not familiar with. I personally prefer a candidate with humility and a willingness to learn."

FINDING THE IDEAL CANDIDATE FOR YOUR FIRM

When you're interviewing a candidate, keep in mind that you were once in their shoes. Aim to make them feel comfortable in order to get the best results and see who they truly are.

"I try to remember how intimidating it felt and how the uncertainty of the process could be daunting," says Dorfman. "For those reasons, I try to dispel any fears and concerns at the outset and try to make the candidate feel welcomed. I believe that allows the candidate to lower his or her guard and answer all the questions in a more honest and unfiltered manner."

About the Author

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