

# Making the job interview work for you

*Shaaron Dalton and Bronwyn Sullivan*

Many young lawyers have recollections of interviews, perhaps articles interviews, which were uncomfortable from the first question until you were ushered out the door and told “we’ll be in touch”. In fact, even in the articles scenario, if you are interviewed at all you are seen on paper as having a suitable background for the role. Whether you attract an offer is largely dependant on the way you conduct yourself in interview, below are some suggestions for making the most of your interview.

## Preparation

As a lawyer, you would not go to a meeting without the information required to have a productive dialogue. The interview itself is chance to showcase your skills so remember to prepare and maximise your opportunity.

1. Learn about the organisation and the position. Read brochures and use your network to find out about the philosophy, style, clients and business of the prospective employer. Also, find out who the position reports to and research the background of that person.
2. Consider your own career goals and your strengths and weaknesses, working out what you as an individual have to offer to the organisation, taking into account the background information you have learned.
4. Prepare a list of about five questions about the position or the employer. Only ask intelligent questions which will help you to decide whether you want the job.
5. If possible, find out the format of the interview. Will it be an informal discussion or does the organisation utilise interviewing techniques such as targeted selection questions or psychological testing. Will there be technical questions to answer?
6. Ask who is conducting the interview and their role in the organisation. Is it the partner to whom the position reports, the managing partner or a senior human resources professional? Each person listed will have a slightly different agenda when interviewing.

## During the interview

Employers ask questions to determine how well candidates handle themselves in a meeting. It is the hidden questions you must remember to address, such as “How confident would my clients feel dealing with this person?”, and “Is this a person who will fit in the firm - do we have a similar work ethic, ethical stance and long term goals?”

1. Present yourself professionally. Wear clothes which are conservative and strong in colour and cut. Watch your body language too, if in doubt, look at the interviewer and mirror their body language.
2. Listen carefully and answer the question asked. Seek clarification of the question and if appropriate further details or examples if necessary.
3. Ask not what they can do for you but tell them what you can do for them (apologies to JFK).
4. Ask questions to get control of the interview and because you need to know. Ask intelligent questions only.
5. Aim for a 50% : 50% balanced discussion between yourself and the interviewer(s).
6. If you want the job, tell the interviewer(s). Enthusiasm is very attractive to an employer.

## Follow up

1. Confirm the procedure for follow up at the end of the meeting with the client. How will they contact you and when?
2. If there is a period of more than a couple of days to wait for feedback, send a brief note thanking the interviewer(s) for their time.
3. If the interviewer(s) ask you for further materials ensure you act promptly or give a time frame and keep to it. Such a request is often a test of your organisational skills, sense of urgency and interest in the position.

## Conclusion

It is important to remember that partners of legal firms and senior executives do not waste their time if they can avoid it. You are at least highly eligible for the position if they are prepared to interview you. Effective preparation, a cool head, a relaxed, yet professional approach and enthusiasm for the job can ensure you have made the maximum impact for success.

*Shaaron Dalton and Bronwyn Sullivan are recruitment consultants for Hamilton Jones & Koller Pty Ltd, specialising in recruitment of solicitors at all levels for commercial law firms and corporations.*