This outline is designed to prepare you for both screening interviews at which a law office determines its level of interest in you and “call-back” interviews at which a firm or law office brings you back for several hours of interviews with a number of different attorneys. Some of these techniques can also help you make an informational interview a more productive means of finding job openings.

I. **BIG PICTURE**

To be successful, you need to:

a. **Build Your Professional Identity and Learn about the Profession**
   - Engage in law school activities and organizations relevant to the job search
   - Bar associations, relevant bar sections, and volunteer work (see handout on handling bar receptions)
   - Attend CSO specialty programs
   - Informational interviews with attorneys in fields of interest (see handout on obtaining an informational interview).

b. **Use Internships, Externships, and Part-time Jobs as the Route to Opportunity and Referrals**
   - Be punctual and reliable – keep your promises
   - Meet people in the firm or office, ask what they do, get to know them
   - Maintain a professional appearance – you want them to think of you as a future lawyer
   - Remember that every task is a job audition
   - Understand the task – Number of hours to spend, research tools, how to get further information

c. **Appreciate the Opportunity**
   Lawyers in private practice charge between $150 and $1000 an hour for their time. The fact that they are spending time with you means that they deem you a qualified candidate and that this interview presents a real opportunity. Make the most of this opportunity. They are investing in you.

d. **Understand What Interviewers are Looking For**
   The interviewer wants to know:
   - Are you smart, knowledgeable, reliable and diligent enough to do this job?
• Do you have the people skills necessary to help the firm gain and retain clients?
• Do your preparation and your answers indicate a sincere and well founded interest in our firm and our practice?
• Will you work well with other lawyers and staff?
• Does he or she want you in the office next to his or hers?

e. Make It Easy For Them To Hire You

II. PREPARATION AND RESEARCH

Preparing for your interview and doing research are necessities in this competitive market. Many interviewers will look at your level of interview preparation as a means to evaluate how well you will prepare for a project, deposition or trial. Show them you have done your homework.

a. Be Prepared About Yourself
Be prepared to discuss every job, school, activity, and publication on your resume and the intricacies of your writing sample. Make sure that you can discuss the article or experience clearly, succinctly and with enthusiasm so that the interview can move forward. Know what makes you special. Know what makes your law school preparation special. Know what sets you apart. Think about your past successes. Know why you are interested in the law office and region. Find something specific to be interested in/about. Identify what you are enthusiastic about. Make your writing sample the best it can be.

b. Be Prepared About the Law Office

Research the firm or agency – look at websites and news stories.

Go one step beyond. Do a Lexis/Westlaw search to see if the firm has been involved in recent cases about which you might ask.

Research each of the lawyers with whom you will interview. Know their specialties, where they went to law school and their civic engagements.

Go one step beyond. Do a Lexis/Westlaw search to see if any of them have been involved in recent and published decisions. To really impress, do research so you can discuss issues in the interviewing lawyer’s specialty within his or her jurisdiction.

Research the city and geographic region so that you can show your sincere interest.

Go one step beyond. Read state bar journals and state bar websites to be up to date on breaking issues in the jurisdiction.
Be careful not to act as if you know more than the attorneys who are interviewing you. Instead, use the information to ask questions, show you are informed and engage in discussion.

c. **Work On Your People Skills**

- Success is heavily influenced by people skills. Practice the art of conversation on every setting.
- Express genuine interest
- Give positive responses
- Listen more than you talk
- Be aware of cues and subtle signals that you are too close to a person or that it is time to stop talking
- Practice at the pharmacy, the grocery store, the Breezeway, etc.
- Practice smiling

d. **Be Ready to Interview**

Interviews can arise on short notice. Make sure you have a conservative interview suit, (buy one on sale so you will be ready)professional looking shoes, and a professional looking portfolio in which to carry extra copies of resume, writing samples, reference lists, transcripts, and a notepad and pen.

e. **Prepare Your References**

Make sure that every person listed as a reference has your most recent resume and is aware that he or she may be contacted. If the employer is interested enough to call references, you do not want the opportunity lost because your reference temporarily forgot why you are a great candidate.

### III. **THE INTERVIEW**

Be on time. Law is a business in which time has value. Lawyers must be punctual for court dates, client meetings, etc. The only way to ensure you will be on time is to **arrive early**. Upon arrival, turn off your cell phone and pay attention to what is going on around you and how people are interacting. You will not appear ready if you are answering calls or texting friends in a waiting area when your interviewer comes out to get you.

Treat the interview as an opportunity to make some new friends. Begin with the receptionist at the front desk when you arrive. Smile. Friendly thoughtful people make good impressions. A hiring partner might well ask a receptionist for his or her opinion. A receptionist who thinks a candidate is rude will surely share that opinion with someone. Have a conversation, remember the name, appreciate the help.
Start out the interview with a smile, a friendly greeting, good posture and a good handshake. First impressions matter. Speak with enthusiasm.

A relaxed and confident demeanor pays dividends. For example, if you are offered something to drink, a polite and gracious acceptance shows you are relaxed and social.

Ensure you have extra copies of resume, writing sample, reference lists and transcript in your portfolio. If the interviewer seems not to have your resume readily available, you help him or her by providing a copy and offering to briefly go over your qualifications. If your offer is accepted, it is a great way to begin. (No need to volunteer the transcripts, but it’s good to seem prepared if it requested).

If you are interviewed by more than one person at a time, make sure to focus attention and eye contact on all the participants.

a. **Responding to Questions: The Three Steps**

Be aware that your responses to questions provide a great opportunity to demonstrate your suitability for the position as well as your personal qualities. Every answer should include:

1. A direct response. Listen to the question and think a moment before answering. A reason or example supporting your answer can make you more effective.

2. Enthusiasm and positive answers

3. A return question that expresses an interest in the interviewer and his or her opinion. This is not a batting practice session in which you merely wait for pitches to hit. This is more like hitting a tennis ball back and forth - a conversation, not an interrogation.

b. **Prepare Answers to Commonly Asked Questions Using the Three Steps**

- Practicing answers to common questions can make you much more articulate and effective.
- Practice including the three steps in your answers until they come naturally.
- Practicing answers with a friend who can give you feedback and ask follow-up questions will be more productive than just practicing by yourself. You want to practice being comfortable and confident.

The three steps can be applied to most questions. For example, if you are asked “What specialty interests you?” you can respond that “I’m enthusiastic about tax law because I enjoyed the courses in ______ and _____ and clerked in an office doing business law but I think I’d enjoy practicing in a number of areas.” Instead of waiting for the next question, ask “How did you come to choose real estate law?” or “What do you enjoy about real estate law?” (Note that these follow-up questions demonstrate that you cared enough about the interview to research the
backgrounds of the interviewers.) Asking what the interviewer likes, enjoys or appreciates will help set a positive tone. Your interviewer will feel better about the interview and you will learn something.

Pausing a moment to think about your answer and why the question is asked can save the interview. For example, you may be asked “Why would you like to come here?” Without thinking, you could launch into a long answer about how you’ve dreamed since childhood of living near the ocean. A moment to think, however, makes you realize the safer answer is to define “here” as the law firm and an opportunity to express enthusiasm for the type of practice and the business environment.

Do not be concerned if you are asked a challenging or negative question about your background or grades. Turn it into a positive. First, honestly acknowledge the issue. Then turn it into a positive.

“Yes, my first year grades were not as high as I would have liked, but, since then, I’ve learned how to study better and last year I______________”

“Yes, I did not have a business background before law school but I’ve joined the Business Law Section of the __________Law Association and taken courses in finance and accounting in our Business School. I think I can_____________."

c. Commonly Asked Questions

Most questions are not intended as traps and some are designed to let you shine. Some will be very open-ended and others will be focused on your resume or your background. You can never be prepared for every question you might face but practicing answers to the following questions using the three steps will give you a good start.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths?
3. Why should I hire you?
4. What do you know about our firm? Our city?
5. What are your hobbies or interests?
6. Where do you see yourself in five years? What is your ultimate goal?
7. What courses have you done best in while attending law school? Will that be your practice interest?
8. What interests you about our city and region?
9. What are your weaknesses?
10. What are you looking for in a law firm?
11. Why did you choose to attend law school?

d. Saying It Doesn’t Make It So: Prove It

Give one or two examples to backup each important assertion. For example, if you are expressing an interest in Elder Law, you can prove your point by telling of your
membership in relevant state bar sections and student societies and mention the relevant courses you took.

e. Your Turn: How to Ask Good Questions

Often, the toughest question you will be asked is “Do you have any questions for me?” It is a mistake not to respond with a question or two. Use your questions to send quality messages about yourself, your preparation and your work ethic. Be prepared so you do not waste your opportunity by asking for information you should already have found on the firm’s web site.

Demonstrate that you’ve done your research by beginning the question with something you’ve learned about the firm or the lawyer. You might ask about a big transaction the firm has been involved in and ask how often a new associate gets to work on something like that. You might have noticed that the interviewer is a past president of the local bar association and ask about the local bar, its collegiality and its values. Your research might have uncovered the fact that the firm represents clients in a certain industry. If, for example, the lawyer with whom you will be interviewing represents condominium associations in Florida, you could do a little research about that business or new legal issues and ask. “I noticed that you represent ___________. I’m interested in learning about that practice area and wondering how the economic downturn has affected your clients.” (or “how the new Florida tax bill will affect their interests.”) Of course, if you mention new legislation, be prepared to answer questions about it.

Do not ask about pay, benefits, vacations, working hours, etc. Once you have an offer, you can find out about such things. Ask about opportunities to learn, opportunities to take responsibility, and opportunities to interact with clients and the community. These kinds of questions help demonstrate that you are interested, motivated, and responsible.

To keep the conversation going, notice your surroundings. Notice the awards, plaques and photos on the wall. (They are there to be noticed and may provide an entry into a conversation) – “I see that you’ve won the Nobel Prize – what was the party like?”

At the end of the interview, be sure to thank the interviewer, say that you enjoyed meeting him or her and express interest in the position. Again, a smile, a good handshake and eye contact will leave a good impression.

Your interview continues until you walk out the last door of the building. Make sure to say thank you to those you see on the way out, especially the receptionist.
IV. **THANK YOU NOTES**

Thank you notes and follow-up correspondence can be helpful. They are a way to show your continued interest and leave the person with a positive impression of you. A note should be short and sent as soon as possible after the interview.

I suggest that you send it within 24 to 48 hours after the event. You can mention something which you and the interviewer discussed ("I enjoyed our conversation about the Hawaii real estate market.") to help the interviewer remember you. If you send notes to multiple interviewers at the same firm, ensure that each note is different. Saying “thank you” is a good habit and one that will help you build strong relationships for the future with these people, whatever the outcome of the interview.

If your interviewer(s) plan to make a quick decision, an e-mail can communicate your appreciation and remind them of your continued interest. If there is more time, you can consider a business letter format or a handwritten note written on a professional looking note card.

In all cases, ensure that you choose your words well and proofread with care. Thank-you’s aren’t given as often as you may think and, if done well, will leave the interviewer with a good impression of you.

If you take the steps outlined above, you will have the peace of mind that comes from knowing that you’ve done your best. Happy Hunting!

DER:kzp