

## THE CALL-BACK INTERVIEW

You've had the first, screening interview---and the employer lets you know that you have been selected for further consideration. You have just been asked for a call-back interview. Congratulations!

This second interview indicates the employer's continued interest in you. During the call-back, the employer will have another opportunity to evaluate you, determine "fit," and sell the firm or organization to you. At the same time, you should be evaluating whether the employer is a good "fit" for your career goals and interests.

Call-back interviews are quite different from initial screening interviews. You will likely be asked to spend a half or full day at the firm. A typical call-back interview will involve four separate 30-minute interviews with attorneys from various departments or practice areas in the morning, a long lunch with several attorneys, and possibly two more interviews after lunch.

This interview is much more comprehensive than the first interview, since employers decide on offers after the call-back interview. Significant additional research and preparation is essential.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

### Acknowledging the Call-Back Invitation

Firms make decisions quickly after the OCI screening interviews concerning which students will be invited to the firm for a call-back interview. Check your mail, telephone messages and e-mail messages at least once daily after your screening interview. You should acknowledge this invitation as soon as possible by telephone and follow-up with an e-mail message to the firm. The firm will help you make any necessary arrangements. If you have questions or concerns, please contact someone in the Career Development Office.

### Making Arrangements

Once you have received a call-back invitation, you should arrange to visit the firm on the earliest possible date. A delay could jeopardize your viability for an offer. DO NOT schedule two call-back interviews in one day. When you are making arrangements, it is fine to ask how long the interviews are expected to last and if you could receive a schedule prior to the interview of the attorneys/staff with whom you will interview.

### The Players

During the call-back interview expect to meet several influential partners and associates, alumni from your law school or undergraduate institution and any other attorney with whom you may work in the future.

If you are particularly interested in certain areas of practice, let the recruitment coordinator know when you schedule the interview. Do not assume the on-campus interviewer will pass this information along. This helps the coordinator to develop a more meaningful schedule for you. More importantly, the quality of your interview performance may improve when you meet with attorneys who share your interests. If the firm's summer program will expose you to a variety of practice areas, be careful about limiting yourself

too much. Generally, firms don't know which practice areas will need new associates in two years. As a result, their summer programs are designed to let several groups view your work and you should remain open and flexible.

**NOTE:** You must walk the fine line between having ideas about your practice area interests (having future goals as a new professional), while communicating openness/flexibility to fitting in wherever the firm has a need.

The attorneys who interview you are doing so because the firm values their judgment, regardless of their job title, area of practice, or length of time with the firm. Partners are not necessarily more central to the decision. The general rule is simple: one person, one vote.

Similarly, recruitment coordinators often sit on the hiring committee, or have influence in the decision. Their opinion is particularly valued because they see all the applicants. The opinion of support staff is also considered. If a secretary or receptionist comments that you were impatient, rude or disrespectful, it can destroy any chance of an offer. Assume that no matter who you are talking to, everything you say will get back to those who decide which candidates will receive offers. Therefore, treat everyone you meet with respect and professionalism.

## **The Interview**

Expect to answer the same questions you were asked during the on-campus interview, perhaps several more times. Remember that attorneys who are seeing you for the first time will be asked to evaluate you and make quick judgments. You need to impress each of these interviewers. Even if you are saying the same things over and over again, keep your energy and enthusiasm visible. Prepare different ways to tell the same story, or describe the same experience in a fresh and engaging way.

Use the call-back interview to evaluate the employer. You should ask questions, but do not inquire about information that can be found with simple research (especially the firm's website). Information on objective topics such as pay, benefits, and billable hours can be found on the firm's NALP form ([www.nalpdirectory.org](http://www.nalpdirectory.org)).

Ask the attorneys more specific questions regarding what your experience with the firm is likely to be. If the firm has a history of hiring its summer associates as new associates after graduation, you will also want to explore that topic. Do some research on cases, practice areas, and attorneys' work at the firm. Be familiar with the professional background of your interviewers.

*For example:*

- Who would assign my work as a summer associate/new associate?
- What kinds of training are provided for summer associates?
- How are summer associates evaluated?
- How are new associates assigned to practice areas? Can changes be made?
- What kinds of training are provided for new associates?
- Do new associates have mentors?
- Do members of the firm get together socially? In what ways?
- How do new associates participate in firm management?

Keep in mind that, just as you may be asked the same questions by different attorneys, you may ask the same questions of different attorneys. It can be valuable to get different perspectives of the same issue from different firm members. Always ask a few thoughtful questions of everyone interviewing you. This communicates interest and enthusiasm in the firm.

## The Meal

The call-back schedule generally includes a meal where, in a more relaxed environment, the firm is able to see you as an individual with a distinct personality. The lunch hosts will determine if you:

- fit into their firm
- have strong interpersonal skills and are enjoyable to be with
- present a professional image
- appear mature and self-confident
- exercise good judgment

Often, young associates will take you to lunch on the theory that you will be more comfortable asking questions of someone closer to your own age. You should not assume young associates or alumni from your law school or undergraduate institution are good friends. **A common mistake is to become too comfortable**, and embarrass yourself or the attorney by asking inappropriate questions such as "How many hours do you *really* work?" Instead, ask about their experiences as new attorneys, what attracted them to the firm— learn a bit about them as people.

**Ordering Lunch.** Order food that is easy to eat – avoid foods like spaghetti or soup. This is not a situation in which you want to order things that are difficult or distracting to eat, or that take a long time for the kitchen to prepare. For example, anything that is messy, hard to cut or likely to splash, requires shell-cracking, or is loaded with garlic. The purpose of the meal is to continue the interview in a more comfortable setting. Follow the interviewer's lead in selecting items from the menu in the appropriate price ranges.

**Avoid alcohol.** Most meals at call-back interviews will be lunch. In a business lunch situation alcohol is not appropriate. You may be asked out for dinner, in which case it is more likely that the interviewer may order alcohol. If you order a drink, follow the interviewer's lead. Do not order alcohol unless the interviewer does, and limit your intake to one. When in doubt, abstain from drinking alcohol as part of the interview process.

## PREPARATION

### Research

You should have more in-depth knowledge about the firm than you did in the screening interview. You should speak to faculty, local practitioners, Career & Professional Development staff, and other students who have worked at the firm. Conduct research by using the Internet, Westlaw, and journals. Know something about the attorneys you are interviewing with as well as the practice areas of the firm and areas they don't practice.

## **Review Your Responses to Likely Questions**

Prepare answers to expected questions. There are certainly many ways to respond to the question: "Why do you want to work at this firm?" Think through the various answers. Your answers should reflect your qualifications for a position with the firm and those attributes that the employer is seeking. Utilize: 1) OCI preparation programs 2) mock interview and interview coaching sessions and 3) printed/online resources offered through the Career Development Office.

## **Prepare Questions to Ask Attorneys**

Always prepare questions to ask your interviewers. The call-back will be an opportunity to ask in-depth questions. Remember, there are two main objectives behind the questions you ask. First, you want your questions to reflect the fact that you have put a lot of thought into the possibility of a long-term relationship with the firm. For example, "I know that associates are expected to develop clients. Does the firm provide marketing training and mentorship for new associates to help with this skill?" Secondly, you want to learn as much as you can about the firm so you can make a good choice if you are fortunate enough to have to choose between offers.

## **What to Bring**

Always bring several copies of your resume (on resume paper), a writing sample, a transcript and a list of references to the call-back interview. Bring these items in a briefcase or portfolio that looks professional.

## **What to Wear**

Wear conservative business attire. It is important that it also be comfortable, since you will be in a lengthy interview setting. Refer to the Tip Sheet on Interview Dress. It is always best to err on the conservative side – dark suit and matching or dark shoes. Take out any tongue, nose or eyebrow jewelry. Refrain from using slang, profanity, or derogatory remarks, comments or jokes.

## **And Remember....**

At the call-back stage, the firm has already decided that you are a strong candidate. Maintain your professionalism, but don't be afraid to show your sense of humor and personality. Demonstrate that you exercise good judgment and are mature, confident, polished, and articulate. Show the employer that not only can you do the job, but you are the best candidate because of your abilities, personality, and enthusiasm. We strongly recommend you do at least one mock interview before going to a firm or a call-back.

## EVALUATING AN OFFER

### Factors to Research and Consider

To evaluate an offer, you need specific information about the employer. You can gather this information in your interviews, through research and by talking to people with knowledge of the firm. Consider the following list of factors. Although the list below refers to “law firms,” it can be used for any employer.

1. What are the firm’s specialties and major areas of practice? How are new attorneys assigned to practice areas: can they choose the area in which they want to practice?
2. What type of projects would a first or second year associate typically do within a given practice area? At what point does an associate have substantial client contact, court time, or primary responsibility for matters?
3. Is the firm’s success tied to a large number of clients or a few? How is the firm affected by the business cycle, i.e., periods of recession? To what extent is the workload seasonal?
4. What is the relationship between junior associates and more senior lawyers in the firm? Does the firm have any type of mentoring or training program? To find out how well the senior members train associates, try to evaluate both the ability of the senior members and their willingness to share their experiences with associates. Separately ask as many members of the firm as possible to describe what other members of the firm do and the extent of their specialization. Be sensitive to what is said—and perhaps more importantly, what is not said.
5. Find out who manages the firm and who makes decisions in the firm. They may not be the same person. Is there a procedure for associates to voice their opinions/concerns that affect the entire firm?
6. Consider how efficiently the firm is operated. Are paralegals and law clerks employed? Are time records kept? Does the firm have a brief bank and a retrieval system? Does the firm have its own forms?
7. How is performance judged? How often, and by whom? What are the criteria for advancement?
8. What are the billable hour expectations? This factor is crucial in comparing offers between firms, particularly when salaries differ. Refer to the tip sheet: “The Truth about Billable Hours.”
9. How long is the partnership track (differences between equity vs. non-equity tracks)? What criteria are used to evaluate partnership candidates? What percentage of the class is eligible for partnership/made partner in each of the last several years? What are the “of counsel” (i.e. non-partnership) possibilities?
10. On what basis is admission to partnership determined? Is it a “competitive standard,” restricted to a small proportion of partners to lawyers in a given field, or “meet the firm’s standard,” all associates who meet the firm’s standard of performance will become partners?

11. What does partnership entail? -- Compensation, responsibilities, contribution? (Note: Many firms will not share this information in much detail with a non-firm member. Expect a general answer).
12. In the past, have any associates left without becoming partners, and if so, why? How long has it taken for an associate to become partner in the past?
13. If an associate does not become a partner, what opportunities will the associate have available? Does the firm help in this regard? Does the firm have many prominent and successful alumni?
14. How active are members of the firm in bar association activities? (This is some indication of the vitality of the firm, and also an indication of the standing of the firm with fellow lawyers and judges.)
15. What is the firm's general character? How stable has the membership of the firm been in the past? Have any members left the firm, and if so, why? Are any members likely to leave in the future? Is anyone seeking to become a judge?
16. How does the firm feel about political activity on the part of associates and members? Does the firm permit freedom in choosing which political party to support? Does the firm object to active political involvement? How does the firm feel about an associate or a member running for political office?
17. What are the firm's prevailing attitudes and practices on such matters as *pro bono* work, community service, and government service? Are these hours billable?
18. How do members of the firm (associates and partners) treat support staff? (Observe this rather than ask about it.) Are non-attorney staff members part of a team or are they viewed as subordinate? What do the staff members consider the best qualities of the firm, and what do they like best/least about their jobs?
19. Are members of the firm people with whom you will enjoy working? Does the firm have a friendly atmosphere? Is it a place where people can laugh and enjoy themselves in spite of their hard work, or is it stiff and formal? Is there a spirit of cooperation among the lawyers?
20. To what extent will the law firm be involved in suggesting or dictating the social life and lifestyle of the associate, and/or spouse or significant other? Does the firm suggest or require memberships in clubs, lodges, organizations, etc.?
21. Since a firm, as a social unit, has a history and some resemblance to a family, what other traditions are there?
22. What emphasis is placed on getting new business and how does it affect compensation? Are there any profit-sharing or pension plans?
23. Does the law firm have a commitment to diversity?

Answers to questions regarding compensation, HR policies, and benefits can be found on NALP forms and the firm's Workplace Environment Questionnaire. If you are unable to find this information, these questions should be directed to the Recruiting Coordinator after you receive an offer.

## **Considerations**

*Consider the following points when comparing and evaluating offers:*

- The starting salary. Remember, considering the salary in light of the billable hour expectation will give you a much better idea of what the firm expects from you. Also, firms take different approaches to compensation for more senior associates and partners.
- The substantive nature of the work you will do and the types of clients you will serve.
- The freedom you have to experiment and develop the type of practice you prefer.
- The extent and quality of training, evaluation and work expectations of the firm.
- The future condition of the organization.
- Your satisfaction with the size and character of the firm.
- The freedom you would have to choose your own lifestyle.