



## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LAW SCHOOL CAREER CENTER

### **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, clarify information on your resume, 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 call-back interview may involve four separate 30-minute interviews with attorneys from various departments or practice areas in the morning, a lunch with two attorneys, and, typically for the larger firms, may include two more interviews after lunch.

Employers decide on offers after the call-back interview so research and preparation is essential. So, what do you do?

### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

#### **Acknowledging the Call-Back Invitation**

If your screening interview was successful, you will be contacted by the employer and asked to visit its office for additional interviews. This contact may come by letter, telephone or e-mail to the contact information you provided in your resume header. **Be sure to check your mail, telephone messages and e-mail messages at least daily after your screening interview. You must acknowledge this invitation as soon as possible by telephone; then follow-up with an e-mail message to the firm.** The firm will help you make any necessary arrangements.

#### **Making Arrangements**

Once you have received a call-back invitation, you should arrange to visit the firm on the earliest possible date. If you delay, you may find that offers have been extended before you have a chance to interview again. Also, avoid scheduling two call-back interviews in a day. It is exhausting to be on stage all day. When you are making arrangements, you should ask how long the interview is expected to last. If you are traveling out of the state for a call-back interview, many firms will reimburse you for travel and hotel.

#### **The Players**

Most applicants see several influential partners and associates, alumni from your law school or undergraduate institution and any other attorney with whom you may have something in common.

If you are particularly interested in a certain area of practice, it is okay to let the recruitment coordinator know when you schedule the interview as long as you do so in a diplomatic, tactful way. This may help the coordinator develop a more meaningful schedule for you. More important, the quality of your interview performance may well improve when you meet with attorneys who share your interests. However, if the firm's summer program will expose you to a variety of practice areas, be careful about limiting yourself too much. Because many firms may not know which practice areas will need new associates in two years, their summer programs are designed to let several groups view your work.

All 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 unlike the attorneys, they see all the applicants. The opinion of support staff is also considered. If a secretary or receptionist comments that you were impatient, discourteous or disrespectful it will impact your chance of receiving 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 the same respect.**

## The Interview

Expect to answer the same questions you were asked during the on-campus interview, perhaps several more times. This happens because attorneys who are seeing you for the first time will be asked to evaluate you and make quick judgments. Thus, you should still be trying to sell yourself. You may find yourself saying the same things over and over again. Be prepared to keep your energy and enthusiasm up even if you are saying something for the tenth time. Remember, the attorney you are talking to is hearing your answer for the first time. You can also anticipate this and prepare different ways to tell the same story, or to describe the same experience to keep yourself fresh.

Use the call-back interview to evaluate the employer. However, don't ask questions that can be found with simple research; information on objective topics such as pay, benefits, billable hours, etc., can be found via the NALP Directory at [www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com) or other resources such as Chambers Associate: Student's Guide to Law Firms.

Ask questions of the attorneys interviewing you that are more specific to 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.

For example:

- Who would assign my work as a summer associate?
- What kinds of training are provided for summer associates?
- How are summer associates evaluated?
- How is work assigned to new associates?
- 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?
- How much time should I expect to devote to professional association activities?
- Do members of the firm get together socially? In what ways?
- How do new associates participate in firm management?
- What is the firm's attitude about *pro bono* work?

Keep in mind that, just as you may be asked the same questions by several attorneys, you may ask the same questions of different attorneys, too. It can be valuable to get different perspectives of the same issue from different firm members. More importantly, it is a *big* mistake to say, "Joe already answered all of my questions....". **Always ask questions of everyone interviewing you.**

## The Meal

The call-back schedule may include 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 whether you:

- fit into their firm;
- have good interpersonal skills;
- are enjoyable and interesting to be with;
- can converse easily;
- 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. Though this can be the case, 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?" or making inappropriate comments such as "Boy, how do you work for that partner? He seems like a real stickler." Instead, ask about their experiences as new attorneys, what attracted them to the firm—and learn a bit about them as people.

**Order something you can eat easily while conversing.** This is not a situation in which you want to order things that are difficult or distracting to eat—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 convivial setting. Also consider what your order says about your personal habits. People with good health habits handle stress better, and make better employees.

**Avoid alcohol.** Most meals at call-back interviews will be lunch. Generally, in any business lunch situation, alcohol is no longer appropriate. You may be asked out for dinner, in which case it is more likely that the interviewer may order alcohol. If you imbibe, follow the interviewer's lead. Do not order alcohol unless the interviewer does, and limit your intake to one. When in doubt, abstain.

## PREPARATION

### Research

You should know more about the firm than you knew in the screening interview. In addition to the resources identified in this handout, you may want to speak to local practitioners, Career Services staff, faculty, and other students who have worked there.

### Review Your Responses to Likely Questions

Prepare answers to expected questions. There are certainly many ways to respond to the question: "What did you do last summer?" What can be said about your summer experience that will give the listener positive information? Your answers should reflect your qualifications for a position with the firm, and those attributes that the employer is seeking that you possess. Review the list of common interview questions asked at the end of this handout.

## Prepare Questions To Ask

Always prepare questions to ask your interviewers. The call-back will be an opportunity to have your questions answered in more depth than during your initial interview. As mentioned above, you can also get into more detail, and get information specific to what your experience at the firm would be like.

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 more and more, associates are expected to not just do the work they are given, but to be rainmakers, and develop clients. Does your firm help foster this by providing any marketing training or mentorship for associates?" And, 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.

Consider these areas in your evaluation:

- Your satisfaction with the size and character of the office community.
- How pleasant the relations are within the firm.
- The future prospects of the firm, particularly in the practice areas you are most interested in.
- The extent and quality of the training provided by the firm.
- The quality of the work that would be referred to you from other members of the firm.
- How much freedom you have to experiment and develop the type of practice you prefer.
- How much freedom you would have to choose your own lifestyle.

The appendix contains "Evaluating an Offer", which lists specific factors to weigh and suggests questions that you can ask to help you make the best decision.

## What to Bring

Always take several copies of your resume, writing sample, transcript and 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.

## And Remember....

Remember, at the call-back stage, the firm has already decided that you are a strong candidate. You want to reinforce that with proper preparation for the call-back interview. However, you also want to show them that you are interesting and enjoyable to be around. 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, polished, articulate and confident. Show the employer that not only can you do the job, but you possess these personal qualities as well.

**If you are contacted for a call-back interview, inform the Career Center via [ocilaw@umn.edu](mailto:ocilaw@umn.edu). Tracking this information enables us to assess and evaluate our process. You can also make an appointment with your counselor to discuss your preparation in more detail.**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PRIVATE EMPLOYERS MAY ASK

Tell me a little about yourself.

Tell me about some of the skills you acquired during the course of your college education.

When did you decide to attend law school and how did you make the decision?

In what areas of study do you feel most competent? In which areas have you improved?

Tell me about one of your work assignments; how did you begin, develop and complete it?

Tell me about a recent work experience you found particularly challenging. What obstacles did you overcome and what results did you achieve?

Tell me about an occasion where you achieved something as a member of a team. What was your role and how was the project organized?

What factors will influence your decision to accept an offer?

How did you pick this law school?

What factors influenced your choice of law as a career?

If you had not been accepted to law school, what career choices might you have made? How do you feel about those choices now?

What personal skills do you bring to your work which would be an asset to the working relationships at our firm?

Tell me about a time when you had to work under time constraints? How did you get the job done?

What have you learned about our firm from others with whom you have spoken? Are there any remaining questions that I might clarify?

What facts about our firm are most important to you?

What are the criteria that you will use to distinguish our firm from other similar firms?

What are you hoping to gain from working with a firm like ours? What work-related contribution has been most satisfying to you?