

10 Ways Students Can Endear Themselves to Employers During the Hiring Process

by Joni L. Peet

Bidding for employers, on-campus interviews, callbacks/flybacks, waiting for offers, juggling offers, making the final decision. . . . This is what second- and third-year law students face during the fall semester above and beyond their class schedules, journals, moot court, and clinics. Wouldn't it be a huge stress reliever to know just how to make that entire interview process become a more positive and, ultimately, more successful activity?

On behalf of legal employers everywhere, I offer the proverbial "ten things" that will endear law students to us (as opposed to frustrating us) and leave us wanting to hire dozens more like them!

- 1. Be humble and kind.** Not that we expect bowing and scraping, but a little humility can go a long way toward making a favorable impression. A cocky attitude will come across as an unpleasant cover for insecurity. Mild self-deprecating humor usually works. Moreover, ALL persons encountered during your callback should be treated with respect. Be courteous, not condescending, to support staff you meet. They are vital to their organization's success, and you will be judged on your ability to relate well to all potential coworkers, not just lawyers.
- 2. Be on time.** Even early. This indicates that you have allowed for contingencies such as heavy traffic, or not finding a parking space in the first ten minutes, and were still able to arrive promptly for the interview. While we will be sympathetic if you come running in five minutes late, short of breath and complaining about the traffic, we are secretly thinking that you did not plan your travel time well enough. Moreover, if you have more than one interview in the same day, it is equally important to be on time for the second one. Try not to fall into the trap of being invited back after lunch to the firm of your morning interview, thereby making you late for your afternoon interview. Politely decline, saying that you "would love to" but you have an appointment at 2:00 pm.
- 3. Be sure addressees match.** We know that students send letters to multiple potential employers; but when the letter inside the envelope is addressed to someone different than on the outside of the envelope, it leaves us a little soured on the applicant. Along the same lines, any reference to the employer within the body of the letter needs to match that of the addressee. Another good idea is to make sure that multiple addressees are not visible to all recipients when sending emails.
- 4. Be firm with your handshake.** When meeting employer representatives for the first time, step forward and shake hands with confident authority and a no-nonsense grip (that doesn't mean cutting off the blood circulation). This approach will help create a much more positive first impression than would a half-hearted, "limp fish" handshake.
- 5. Be ready with two or three "meaty" questions for your interviewer.** When asked by the interviewer if you have any questions, say "Yes!" The response of "No, I think I've had all of my questions answered" — or, worse yet, "How do I get back to the Interstate?" — translates to the interviewer as a lack of interest. Instead, students should plan a question or two to ask in such situations that are not "canned" or boilerplate — perhaps a question about the firm's growth philosophy or what role the firm plays in

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community service. An interested, enthusiastic student is a breath of fresh air!

6. **Be complimentary.** Don't try the Eddie Haskell "Nice sweater, Mrs. Cleaver" type of compliment, but do consider a greeting that quickly follows with a comment about how great your hotel was the night before or an appreciative statement about the firm's artwork. It is a positive beginning to the callback and makes us feel good about you right from the start.
7. **Be kind to employers' pocketbooks.** While many law firms have written parameters for travel expenses, there can be quite a bit of "wiggle" room. Students should make responsible and considerate choices whenever it is up to them to make decisions regarding if, when, and how to spend. Employers will appreciate the mature approach and will not feel as though they are being taken advantage of.
8. **Be prompt in rejecting offers.** It goes without saying that employers would like all of their offers to be accepted on the spot. The real world of legal hiring, however, is a delicate balancing act between offers and decisions. As soon as a student makes that tough decision to accept or reject, it needs to be communicated to the employer immediately. Certainly calling to accept is more fun than turning down an employer, but rejecting an offer must be done just as promptly! Our feelings will not be hurt (well, maybe a little), but we will think very highly of you for having the courtesy and courage to let us know in a timely manner. Either a phone call or an email will obviously get the word to us more quickly than regular mail. A rejection letter that is received two weeks after a decision has been made will keep another student unfairly waiting for that elusive offer.
9. **Be interested.** This has already been touched upon in some of the other tips, but it cannot be stressed enough! Student interest in an employer is typically gauged by alertness, level of engagement with interviewer, eye contact, number and quality of questions

posed, and enthusiasm. Lack of interest, whether real or perceived, is a major reason for unsuccessful callbacks.

10. Be realistic in your post-offer requests.

Leave the sun, moon, and stars up in the sky, and, instead, stay grounded on earth when asking for special considerations related to your offer and subsequent employment. For instance, while many employers will invite (quite sincerely) offerees for a return visit to meet more people and get to know the firm better, students should know that asking for more than one post-offer visit can wear out your welcome. Further, if policies are clearly stated regarding allowed travel/moving/housing expenses, it is not advisable to seek exceptions to those policies. If there is a prescribed start date for employment, absent extenuating circumstances, that is the day new hires are expected to be there. You want to show up that first day amid sincere welcoming faces, not coworkers inwardly groaning because the new pain-in-the-neck associate has arrived.

Notwithstanding the above, employers will be as accommodating as possible to ensure a smooth transition into the legal workplace.

So there it is. Most of the foregoing really comes down to common courtesy, common sense, and consideration. Following these tips may not guarantee an offer, but there is little doubt that employers will respond much more positively to law students who take the above suggestions to heart.

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