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Acing the Interview

A recent survey of executives conducted by our company found that job seekers make more mistakes during the interview than in any other phase of the job-search process. This news may make you even more apprehensive over the prospect of meeting with a potential employer, but it doesn't have to. In fact, by preparing thoroughly for the discussion and understanding common pitfalls to avoid, professionals can turn this challenging situation into an opportunity.

Simply put, the interview is your time to shine. Receiving an invitation to personally discuss a job opportunity means the organization was impressed by your resume and intrigued enough to bring you in for further insight into your abilities and experience. Today's legal professionals must be able to present complex data and concepts, often in layperson's terms, to clients, colleagues and senior management. Clearly expressing your thoughts and showcasing your talents during the meeting with a hiring manager demonstrates, among other qualities, your strong communication skills.

The following advice can help you make a positive impression:

- **Research the employer.** One of the biggest mistakes job applicants make is not knowing enough about the organization. Even before you submit your resume, review articles in trade publications, business journals and local newspapers to learn as much as you can about the firm. Also speak with contacts in your professional network, who can share their insights and experiences. The information you gather will help you speak directly to the opportunity and show your enthusiasm for the role.
- **Understand the value you bring.** Fundamentally, a hiring manager wants to know why you're the right person for the opportunity. Develop a plan before the interview that will help you answer this question and distinguish yourself as a top candidate. Study the job description again and determine how your unique skill set will enable you to succeed in the role.
- **Consider potential answers to common questions.** While you never know exactly what you will be asked during an interview, chances are you will be presented with a few common questions, such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "What are your most significant accomplishments in previous positions?" As much as possible, provide specific examples of how you helped former employers and tie your responses to the needs of the opening. For example, in response to the first question, you might say, "I'm a strong communicator, but I would like to improve my public speaking skills. I've taken classes in this area, and recently delivered my first client presentation, which resulted in new business for my firm." As you answer the interviewee's queries, be straightforward but remember to remain positive, avoiding derogatory comments about past managers or colleagues.

- **Demonstrate your confidence.** Sometimes, *how* you say something leaves a bigger impression than *what* you say. That's why it's imperative to demonstrate confidence through your body language. Greet the hiring manager with a strong handshake and maintain eye contact throughout the discussion. Avoid gestures that make you appear nervous, such as excessive hand motions or constantly tapping your fingers or feet. But a quick word of caution: Remember the difference between confidence and arrogance. Our company's research has found the worst mistake a management-level job candidate can make during an interview is displaying too much hubris.

- **Take your turn to ask questions.** The employment interview is a time not just for the company to evaluate your qualifications for the position, it's also your chance to determine if the opportunity is right for you. Decide in advance the aspects of the role and the business about which you'd like to learn more so you can ask the hiring manager related questions. Examples may include: "What are the organization's long-term growth objectives?" "How does this position fit into the firm's overall strategy?" "What constitutes superior performance?" "What will be expected of me in the first few months?"