

# CALLBACK INTERVIEWS: How to Master Them

## CDO Handout Series #14

### WHAT IS A CALLBACK INTERVIEW

A callback interview is an indication of significant interest on the employer's part. You should feel confident going into the call back that you already have made a positive impression. The employer has decided, in essence, that you can do the work and that you appear to fit the office culture. The purpose of the callback is to see you in the office, interacting with multiple office members in a variety of different settings, to decide if that elusive "fit" really does exist. Many of the factors that make up a hiring decision involve intangibles, such as chemistry, personality and the attorneys' ability to view you as a colleague with whom they would feel comfortable working. The best preparation, therefore, is to relax and be yourself!

Remember, you are interviewing the firm at the same time that they are interviewing you, so look to see whether the firm meets your specific needs. Is the atmosphere to your liking? Are doors open or closed? How are attorneys relating to support staff? How do partners relate to associates? Are they chatting in the hallways, in their offices, or simply passing each other by? These are just a few of the firm culture indicators that you might wish to consider.

### ACKNOWLEDGING THE CALL-BACK INVITATION

1. Acknowledge the invitation. Your callback invitation may come by phone call, usually made by the attorney who initially interviewed you, or by letter from the firm or organization. Acknowledge this invitation as soon as possible, preferably by telephone, unless the firm has indicated that you should reply by letter. The firm then will help you make the necessary arrangements for your callback interview.
2. You may decline some. You are NOT required to accept all callback interviews. Callbacks are time consuming for you and the employer, and you should engage in second-round interviews only with those organizations in which you have a strong interest. You do not want to overextend yourself or the quality of your interviews will suffer. Refusing a callback will not offend the employer. Keep in mind, though, that since most employers extend a limited number of invitations, it is courteous to decline the invitation *as soon as possible* so that an invitation can be extended to someone else—possibly a fellow student. Similarly, if you must cancel or reschedule a callback, give the employer as much notice as possible, ideally at least three, but not less than two, business days.

## **LOGISTICS**

1. Schedule callbacks ASAP. Set up a callback as soon as your schedule permits. Generally you'll be given a choice of dates. Many firms make their hiring decisions on a rolling basis, so fewer spots are open toward the end of the hiring season. If you are interviewing out of town and receive more than one callback for the same city, try to set up both interviews for the same trip (firms like this because it allows them to share expenses—see more on this subject below).
2. Calendar the date. Keep track of all your interview dates and other important dates on one calendar, so that you can avoid scheduling interviews when you have other commitments, such as competitions or exams.
3. Generally the callback lasts several hours. It often will include a lunch as well.
4. Ask the recruiter some questions. When setting up a callback, ask the firm representative (often the recruiting coordinator) for the names of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting. If the schedule has not yet been set, ask if you may call back a day or two ahead of time to get the names of your interviewers. This will allow you to research the background of your interviewers on Martindale Hubbell, West Legal Directory, or on the firm's website. You might even be asked if you would like to meet with attorneys in specific practice areas. Feel free to volunteer this information if you are not asked. This is a great way to connect with attorneys who do the type of work you want to do. If you don't have a preference, ask to meet with practitioners in a variety of areas.

## **EXPENSES**

1. When in doubt—ask! Most firms cover all expenses directly related to the call back (e.g., transportation out of the area, hotel accommodation, meals, etc.). Some will make the arrangements up front, while others will expect you to cover the initial outlay and then seek reimbursement. It is appropriate to ask for clarification of each firm's particular system! If making the initial outlay would impose a significant financial hardship, speak with the recruiting coordinator about your specific situation. Consider the use of questions such as, "How does your firm handle travel arrangements?" "What expenses are covered?" "Do you mind if I book my return flight for Sunday since I will be staying with family and it won't create any additional expenses for the firm?" Make an appointment to speak with a career advisor to brainstorm ways to approach related issues involving expenses.
2. Notify firms of other interviews in the same city. This is the only way that firms can seek reimbursement from one another for shared expenses. Understandably, firms do not like to find out that they paid the entire cost for a trip that involved a callback at another firm.
3. Use your best judgment in reporting expenses. Firms do not like to cover expenses not related to your interview with them (e.g., cab fare to an interview within commuting distance, hotel bills for long distance phone calls, massages, or in-room movies). Use your best judgment and remember that your expense report can reflect on your candidacy.

## **PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

1. Practice your answers. Careful preparation for the callback will increase your confidence and chances for success. Preparation is similar to that for your initial interview, only more in depth. Analyze in advance your interests, skills, quality of life issues and geographic preferences. Be prepared to talk in depth about your resume and to articulate your career goals. Practice vocalizing your answers, either by having a friend ask them to you or by sitting in front of a mirror. Reading through a list of questions and just thinking about your answers is not the same as actually trying to articulate your strengths, goals, and interests.

2. Prepare for your Achilles heel. Identify any areas of your background that you may feel uncomfortable talking about: your GPA., your lack of legal experience, your reasons for changing careers, any gaps in your schooling or jobs. Practice answering questions about your weaknesses in a positive and concise way. Do not dwell on the subject—instead, focus on how you have learned from the experience and move onto a strength. Career advisors are happy to brainstorm with you appropriate responses to these questions.

3. Know your strengths. Be confident and convey your strengths and accomplishments. It is important that the interviewer see your personality and decide that you are someone with whom they would like to work on a daily basis.

4. Know the firm inside and out. Research the organization as thoroughly as possible. Most large firms have their own websites and marketing materials; you should review them. You should walk into your interview knowing at least the basics about a firm, such as the number of attorneys, the locations of offices, the practice areas, representative clients, and how they run the summer program. Other good sources of information include: employer information on McGeorgeCareersOnline, student evaluations located in the Career Development Office library, TheVault Guide, The Insider's Guide to Law Firms, Martindale Hubbell ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com)), West Legal Directory, recent news articles, and students, attorneys and professors who have worked at the firm.

a. Know how to pronounce the firm name. If you are unclear about how to pronounce the firm name (don't laugh—this happens a lot!), call the main number and listen carefully to how the receptionist says the name. Feel free to ask him/her to repeat the name slowly—they won't report you to the managing partner or take a voice spectrograph analysis!

b. Know if alumni work in the firm. Find out if there are McGeorge alumni at the firm. Consider placing a call to recent graduates to ask about their work, level of responsibility, client contact, etc.

c. Know who's interviewing you. You may call the firm's recruitment department the day before your interview to find out who will be interviewing you. Although your schedule might still change, take the time to look up the specific interviewers and read about their backgrounds. Most firms have informative attorney biographies on their websites. If you and your interviewer attended the same undergraduate school, be prepared to talk about it.

d. Know the interviewer's work. Students have reported that a wonderful way to flatter interviewers is to have skimmed articles they have written (you can get this information from Martindale Hubbell) and to have a discussion about it.

5. Prepare questions to ask lawyers. Based upon your research, you should prepare questions to ask the interviewers; the questions should be aimed at enhancing your understanding of the work of the firm and of the professional environment. Ask questions of every interviewer. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the same questions of several attorneys; in fact, this may be a good way to hear different perspectives about working at the firm. Sometimes, an interviewer will have answered your questions even before you have the opportunity to ask them. When this happens, ask the interviewer to expand upon something the two of you discussed.

6. Confirm the basics. Make sure that you know how to get to the office and who to ask for when you arrive. Most firms are located in large buildings and you should get to the building early. Many of these large buildings have strict security measures in place; therefore, allot for time to check-in and bring a photo ID. Plan to arrive in the firm's offices about 10–15 minutes early to acclimate yourself to the office.

7. Bring extra copies of everything. Always bring a few extra copies of your resume, transcript, writing sample(s) and a list of references. Your list of references should be on a separate sheet of bond paper with the same heading you used on your resume, titled, "List of References." Generally, three references are sufficient and they may be professors and employers.

## **DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

1. Be personable. When you arrive for your callback interview, you are usually met by the recruitment coordinator or someone from the recruitment staff. You will receive the schedule for the day, including the names of the attorneys with whom you will be speaking. Expect more informal conversations during the callback, as the firm is trying to gauge your "personability" quotient.

2. Expect a busy office setting. While you are interviewing it is common for secretaries to go in and out with messages or questions and for the attorney to take urgent phone calls. Don't be thrown off. Disruptions can provide a welcome break, giving you time to relax and to scan the office. Maybe you'll see some office decoration, a photo, or client memorabilia that will spark a comment or question such as, "I noticed that model of a McDonnell Douglas satellite. Did you work on their financing?"

3. Sounding like a broken record is a good thing. The callback is really just a string of screening interviews in rapid succession. The key is to transmit essentially the same package of information to each person with whom you meet. If you have one anecdote that is a particularly good illustration of your interpersonal skills, try to weave that story into each interview. At all costs, however, resist the inclination to go into auto-pilot with this constant repetition. Relive the story each time you tell it—actually picture it in your mind rather than simply saying the words. This technique will keep you fresh instead of sounding canned.

4. Be conscious of your energy level. Consider the callback an endurance test. Not only will you be repeating yourself throughout the day, but you'll need to be "on" for several hours. Your energy level needs to be (as much as possible) as high at the end of the day when you're walking out the door as it was when you came in. Get a good night's sleep the night before. Don't take the red eye and head right to your interview! Pay attention to your energy level throughout the day. When tired you often let your guard down and pay less attention to what you're saying. That's when the bloopers occur! See below for an illustration:

### **Scenario A**

Interviewer asks innocuous question such as, “so how’s this whole interview process going?”

Student (feeling tired and not really thinking about what s/he is saying), “well, it’s actually pretty exhausting and I’ll look forward to the end of interviews and being able to get back to my reading. . .”

Interviewer (to himself), “gee, what a downer!”

### **Scenario B**

Interviewer asks innocuous question such as, “so how’s this whole interview process going?”

Student (remembering that every question presents an opportunity to market yourself), “well, it’s actually been very interesting because I’ve been able to meet and speak with a number of practitioners who do exactly what I hope to be doing one day. The whole process has made me really excited about getting out and beginning practice.”

Interviewer (to himself), “gee, what a positive way to view a pretty stressful experience. We should hire this person!”

If you find yourself getting tired, stay focus, complete the interview, and ask for either the “ladies room” or “men’s room”. Once inside, wash your face pull yourself together.

5. The callback is all about fit. As mentioned above, the screening process resolved the issue of your competence to do the work. The callback is really an opportunity for the attorneys to see you in their setting and to see how well you fit. Being relaxed enough to be yourself is important. Small talk also plays a role; your interview continues while you are walking from one office to the next, speaking with support staff, and at lunch. While all of this is going on, you also will have the opportunity to evaluate them. Remember, you have power in this process as well—the power to decide what is right for you.

6. Be nice to the support staff. Your behavior toward support staff is frequently factored into a hiring decision. Treat all staff members as you would a hiring attorney. They are valued members of the team. Firms often report back to our office that a negative or positive opinion from support staff was decisive in their decision-making process.

7. Take your time. Because callbacks are on-site and scheduled so that only one or two take place a day, you probably will have more time in each interview—generally 20 to 30 minutes. Take advantage of this flexibility to get your message across. You almost always will have time to sum up your qualifications or to ask that extra question that means a lot to you.

### **QUICK TIPS FOR ACTUAL INTERVIEW**

1. Assume everyone you meet with during the day is interviewing you.
2. Dress conservatively and professionally.
3. Greet everyone you meet with a solid handshake.
4. Use Mr./Ms. unless you are told otherwise.
5. Sit up straight in your chair and maintain eye contact during the interview.
6. Remember to smile.
7. Speak clearly and slowly—when people are nervous, they tend to speak more quickly.
8. Tailor your answers to the employer (practice areas, size, location, etc.).
9. Tailor your questions to each interviewer and to the conversation.

10. Stay interested and enthusiastic throughout the visit—never appear bored and do not yawn.
11. Speak positively about previous employers even if you had a less than perfect experience.
12. Be honest, don't exaggerate about your experiences or pretend to know more than you do.
13. Stay focused on the interviewer; don't take notes during your interview.

### **HANDLING THE CALLBACK LUNCH**

1. Treat the lunch as part of the interview. The lunch is simply an opportunity for the attorneys to see you in a different setting. This is not a break! While the conversation often seems more relaxed and casual, your behavior and conversation during lunch will be evaluated in the hiring decision. If the conversation stays on non-business topics, go with it. We often hear from attorneys that simply chatting with a student can give them the information they need to make their hiring decision.

Specific lunch tips:

- a. Make your order simple. You'll generally be asked to order first, so know what you want and make it simple for ease of eating!
- b. Order wisely. Order foods that are easy to eat (forget the spaghetti) and stay away from garlic, etc.
- c. No alcohol. Avoid alcohol even if your lunch companions order drinks. Stick with iced tea, soda, lemonade, etc.
- d. No lobster. Avoid the most expensive item on the menu.
- e. Follow others. Follow the lead of the attorneys, order an appetizer (or dessert) only if they do.

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

1. Always ask about next steps. Interestingly, employers have frequently told us that they gauge the level of a student's interest by whether the student asks about the anticipated date for a hiring decision. This is a good question to ask the recruiter who often will meet with you at the end of the day. You can also ask the last person with whom you meet.
2. Stop by to see your initial interviewer. It's a nice touch to stop by the office of the attorney who conducted your screening interview either prior to or after your call-back. This is the person who is responsible for your being invited into the firm, so check in to say thanks and reaffirm your interest.
3. Take notes in your car. Shortly after leaving the office, take notes about your impressions of the particular firm. Were office doors open? Did people speak to one another on a first-name basis? What was the interaction between attorneys and support staff like? Were people behaving friendly and respectfully towards one another? Was the office busy or quiet? Did associates look happy—or harried and overworked? Did you like the surroundings? You should leave with the impression that you would enjoy spending time in the office as you may be spending more waking hours there than in your home.
4. Send thank you notes within 24–48 hours of the callback. Either write a separate (i.e. truly different!) and error-free letter to each person with whom you met, or (better yet) write one letter to the person who was in charge of your visits and ask him or her to thank the others with whom you met; "cc" the recruiter. In addition, you can always leave voice mail messages of thanks with the other attorneys.

## **TIMING OF OFFERS AND ACCEPTANCES**

1. There is no general rule on the timing of offers, rather, timing depends on many factors, including the firm's policy, the target size of a firm's summer class, and the quality of students interviewed. Many firms have a hiring committee that meets weekly to discuss their candidates. Other firms may defer decisions on all or some candidates until they have met with more or all candidates, in which case it might be several weeks before you hear from the firm.
2. After your interview, it is appropriate to ask an employer when you can expect to hear back from them. If you do not hear in the expected time, wait another week and then follow-up by e-mail or a phone call. Additionally, if there is a change in your credentials after the call-back (selected for a law journal, beginning a part-time position), e-mail or call the firm with your good news.
3. The National Association for Law Placement has set standards for the timing of offers of employment and job acceptances. All employers having forty attorneys or more and who recruit on campus are requested to comply with these "Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruiting Activities." Although most firms abide by these rules, these standards are just guidelines and NALP does not have any enforcement power.  
The standards include, but are not limited to, the following:

*Note: These Part V General Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions were approved by the NALP Board of Directors on February 2, 2008, and are in effect for the 2008–2009 recruiting season on a provisional basis. In April 2009, the NALP membership will vote on continuation of these provisions. For more information see [www.nalp.org/partv](http://www.nalp.org/partv).*

To promote fair and ethical practices for the interviewing and decision-making process, NALP offers the following standards for the timing of offers and decisions:

### **A. General Provisions**

1. All offers to law student candidates ("candidates") should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter unless the offers are made pursuant to Paragraphs B and C below, in which case the later response date should apply.
2. Candidates are expected to accept or release offers or request an extension by the applicable deadline. Offers that are not accepted by the offer deadline expire.
3. A student should not hold open more than five offers of employment at any one time. For each offer received that places a student over the offer limit, the student should, within one week of receipt of the excess offer, release an offer.
4. Employers offering part-time or temporary positions for the school term are exempted from the requirements of Paragraphs B and C below.
5. Practices inconsistent with these guidelines should be reported to the student's career services office.

### **B. Full-Time Employment Provisions**

1. Employers offering full-time positions to commence following graduation to candidates not previously employed by them should leave those offers open for at least 45 days following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first. Offers made after December

- 15 for full-time positions to commence following graduation should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter.
2. Students may request that an employer extend the deadline to accept the employer's offer until as late as April 1 if the student is actively pursuing positions with public interest or government organizations. Students may hold open only one offer in such circumstances. Employers are encouraged to grant such requests.
  3. Employers offering full-time positions to commence following graduation to candidates previously employed by them should leave those offers open until at least November 15 of the candidate's final year of law school.
  4. Employers offering candidates full-time positions to commence following graduation and having a total of 40 attorneys or fewer in all offices are exempted from the provisions of this section. Offers made on or before December 15 should remain open for a minimum of three weeks. Offers made after December 15 should remain open for at least two weeks.

### **C. Summer Employment Provisions for Second and Third Year Students**

1. Employers offering positions for the following summer to candidates not previously employed by them should leave those offers open for at least 45 days following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first. Offers made after December 15 for the following summer should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter.
2. Students may request that an employer extend the deadline to accept the employer's offer until as late as April 1 if the student is actively pursuing positions with public interest or government organizations. Students may hold open only one offer in such circumstances. Employers are encouraged to grant such requests.
3. Employers offering positions for the following summer to candidates previously employed by them should leave those offers open until at least November 15.
4. Employers offering candidates positions for the following summer and having a total of 40 attorneys or fewer in all offices are exempted from the provisions of this section. Offers made on or before December 15 should remain open for a minimum of three weeks. Offers made after December 15 should remain open for at least two weeks.

### **D. Summer Employment Provisions for First Year Students**

1. Law schools should not offer career services to first-semester first year law students prior to November 1 except in the case of part-time students who may be given assistance in seeking positions during the school term.
2. Prospective employers and first year law students should not initiate contact with one another and employers should not interview or make offers to first year students before December 1.
3. All offers to first year students for summer employment should remain open for at least two weeks after the date made.

Should you have any questions as you participate in your callback interviews, please make an appointment with an advisor in the Career Development Office. We are always glad to meet with you and help guide you through your job search. Good luck!

*Note: Thank you, UC Hastings Career Development Office, for allowing us to review your Callback handout and to incorporate sections of it here.*