

What a Company Recruiter Should be Prepared to Answer at an Interview

When hiring in-house counsel, certain things are obviously different due to the stature of the candidate, but there are other steps that are formal and need to be conducted in line with organizational realities. In these steps, little difference can be made between an ordinary candidate for an executive post, or a lawyer. However, the manner in which such steps are conducted can differ between candidates for executive posts and lawyers.

For example, in regular jobs, background checks are essential and a formalized part of the process only after a candidate has been shortlisted for possible employment. However, while hiring in-house counsel, it is prudent to run harmless internet checks on social networks and other published activity before conducting an interview without making direct published queries. One of the best methods to check the background of a lawyer before an interview is to put his/her name in quotes and search in Google News. Usually, such a search brings up a lot of information about the candidate, including previous roles and employers, without upsetting etiquette or protocols.

In-house counsel are hired mostly through lateral recruitment or references for senior positions. But, with e-recruitment becoming the most popular and cost-effective method of reaching a wider talent pool, it is also not surprising to find out-of-state candidates applying for in-house positions. In such cases, reference checks and other formal background checks including checks on social networks and news become mandatory before arranging an interview.

In this article, we have focused on a topic which is well-recognized, but rarely discussed: How an interviewer should prepare to answer questions at an interview.

Why do you, as an interviewer, need to be ready to answer questions when interviewing in-house counsel?

While every recruiter knows that an interview is no more a one-way process with the interviewer asking questions and the interviewee providing answers, interviewing lawyers has very different dimensions: things can quickly get out of hand, if the interviewer is not well prepared. Lawyers, and especially good lawyers, are expected to possess forceful personalities and to be able to command their presence on negotiation tables. Thus, it is not uncommon to find inexperienced interviewers handing over the reins of the interview to potential candidates unknowingly. The usual result of such a happening is loss of a potential candidate or a wrong hire.

Candidates for jobs of in-house counsel are people trained to be aware of the significance of, and

reaction to, each question asked, and people who know well enough how to cross-examine or pose leading questions to others.. If, as an interviewer, you are not ready with answers to questions you might face while interviewing an in-house counsel, you'll likely find yourself in a situation similar to being on the dock. So, be prepared with your answers before you go to interview an in-house counsel.

Common questions that interviewers need to be ready to answer when conducting an interview of in-house counsel

Be sure that a lawyer appearing for an interview has done his/her homework on your company and offered job, and would like to find out how the offered role matches his/her skills, interests, and career objectives. Good lawyers value their own skills and abilities, and won't jump at just any job, even though they might be facing financial difficulties.

Whether a candidate for your in-house counsel job actually asks you the following questions or not, it is prudent for you to be prepared to answer them, and having answers to the following questions would also help you to keep command of the interview.

1. Questions about your organization

Questions that a potential in-house counsel can ask you during the interview would obviously include questions about the organization including questions on work-environment, company philosophy, and strengths and weaknesses . Mind you, it is natural for a potential in-house counsel to ask such questions because a good lawyer would proactively seek out ways to contribute to a new organization and find the organization-to-person fit.

Other ordinary organizational questions faced by the interviewer would include questions about competitors, equal employment opportunities, expectations from employees, business targets, organizational hierarchy, reporting authorities, management style, short and long-term goals, and how the job role and responsibilities offered fit in with company goals.

It would also be prudent to be ready to answer questions on future expansion plans, interrelation of the legal department with other departments, violations of corporate culture, and work/life balance, among other things.

2. Questions about the offered job

More than questions about money, the first questions that interviewees tend to ask include learning about work hours, the average hours worked by others in similar jobs in the company, why did the last person on the job leave, or what were the problems the company had with the last person who was in the job. Some of these questions might be uncomfortable to answer if you are not prepared. While you

may not expect an ordinary candidate to ask such questions, when it comes to in-house counsel, be ready.

Around the offered job position, the interviewee could also ask about co-workers, and the reporting authority. Keep in mind, in-house counsel candidates are truly inventive when it comes to asking questions to the interviewer. This happens because the study of law and logic creates an insight into human affairs, and lawyers, when they feel they need to learn something, can be very blunt and to the point.

Lawyers would ask questions of the interviewer like “why do you need people like me? Why do you think a new law graduate won't be able to do this job?” and floor you, if you are unprepared. That simple question is geared to make you admit the exact requirements, which the candidate can rely upon during negotiations of salary.

Other ordinary questions about the job can include questions on opportunities, restrictions, competitive benefits, foreseeable challenges, job performance evaluation, and who would be an ideal employee for this job, among other things.

One question, which lawyers are particularly prone to ask of interviewers is “what would be my first task if I am hired?” If the interviewer fumbles, he is likely to lose the candidate. If he says somebody else knows the answer, then he/she immediately diminishes in stature and the interview loses its importance.

3. Questions about reward systems and growth opportunities

These are questions, of course, recruiters are ready to handle in the course of any interview, but lawyers might pose questions that can still make an interviewer uncomfortable. For example, there may be direct questions, not only about salary and non-salary components, but about how the reward system is tied to individual vis-à-vis team-based performance. While other candidates would be happy to get a job, even a penniless lawyer could ask you directly about your rewards given for exceptional performance.

4. Direct questions about the interviewer

Very often potential in-house counsel would like to formally acquaint themselves with the interviewer (lawyers are always networking, and even if they don't get the job they would still create a network acquaintance) and can ask you questions like when you joined the company, how long have you worked, how long did it take you to get promoted to where you are, why do you like it in the company, and a little slip during those innocuous questions can have far reaching effects.

So, when preparing to interview a lawyer for the post of an in-house counsel, carefully prepare a list of

all possible questions the interviewee might ask you and be ready with your answers before you walk into the interview room.

Best of luck.

Source:

Diane Arthur, *Recruiting, Interviewing, Selecting and Orienting New Employees* (New York: AMACOM, 2006)