

Recruitment Skills For Attorneys – Cliff Notes Version

We don't need to re-invent the wheel for sure when it comes to many **recruitment skills** and especially when it comes to **pre-employment testing**. I recommend you go check out www.OmniaGroup.com after reading this report. They developed the interview questions you see further below, since they have been involved with pre-employment testing with law firms for about a decade now. Their **Omnia Profile** is the one you want to use in **pre-employment testing**.

Once you have reviewed their website, be sure to request a sample profile from them by filling out a contact form on their website which is located at <http://www.omniagroup.com/trial/index.asp>. Their interview questions below do not say they are for associate recruitment; however, I see no reason why you would not want to use them when interviewing associate candidates as well.

Hire The Most Qualified Candidate

A medium or large firm certainly wants to recruit well; however, if you are in a solo or small firm you really need to **hire the most qualified candidate you can find**. Pay them up to 20% more than market rates to assure they will be very happy to accept the position and stay with you for years and years. Any size law practice will be in much better shape if you **recruit the best candidate you can and pay them very well**.

This principle is even more imperative for solo and small firms. Why? A solo and small firm can't afford the **high costs of turnover** or the time it takes lawyers (or other senior staff) to spend cleaning up the mess created by less experienced or trained staff.

For all sizes of firms, lawyers and partners must have **absolute confidence in their team** or they won't delegate and leverage well, thus costing tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Where To Look For Recruits

In recruiting a new team member, the **last place** you want to do that is in the classifieds of your local newspaper. The worst candidates are usually looking in that location and you will spend a lot of time "kissing frogs" until you find your prince or princess. I am not saying never to use this method, just don't go there first.

Turn To Your Team

Probably the **best first method** is to **offer your existing team a bonus** for finding you a good candidate. For example, you would offer to pay the team member who finds the person hired say \$300 to \$500 when the new person is hired, and another \$300 to \$500 when the person has been on the job say 3 to 6 months. This way **your team is reinforced** for finding someone who is not only hireable but will be a long-term team member.

Spread the Word to the Outside

You also might make the same offer to external people involved in training paralegals at paralegal schools, or your local paralegal association president for example. No, you don't want a new grad; however, you do want them to **spread the word** among the paralegals they know, which is plenty.

You might offer in your conversation the bonus money could be paid to their favorite charity if they preferred. This is often a good touch, particularly if you are making the offer to a president of a paralegal association. This strategy can work in recruiting attorneys as well. Try it when recruiting for an attorney with other attorneys.

Use Legal Temporary Agencies

Another good place may be **legal temporary agencies** where you can "test" before you "buy." You may have to pay a fee to the temporary agency for the privilege of hiring the person often. That can be worth it when you consider the long term. Placement agencies that specialize in legal professionals may be useful as well in terms of their cost over the long term.

Place Ads

If you are going to place ads, see if you can place one in legal publications like through your local or state bar association. I have had attorneys I worked with do well in finding people online through www.craigslist.com believe it or not.

Job Banks and Specialized Websites

Finally, don't rule out professional association job banks and other websites that specialize in legal professionals. Here is a partial list:

<http://jobs.lawinfo.com/>

<http://careers.findlaw.com/>

<http://www.calawjobs.com/>

<http://www.rileyguide.com/law.html>

<http://www.legalstaff.com/index.asp>

<http://www.workgateways.com/job-legal.html> (United Kingdom only)

The Omnia Group will also be happy to help you in more detail on recruitment with even more detailed expertise than I would be able to offer. So feel free to contact them for more tips, techniques and solutions. Now let's get on to their very fine interview questions.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR Legal Assistant/Secretary – Paralegal POSITIONS:

1. What would your current supervisor say makes you most valuable to them?

This should map out direct benefits of candidate's actions. Listen to clues as to how they made the boss' life easier.

2. How does your position relate to the overall goals of your department or company?

Will indicate whether the candidate can tie his/her individual performance to the "big picture" or how they impact areas outside their immediate department.

3. Every company has its own "quirks." What was/were your last company's problem areas? How much tolerance do you have for dealing with a company's shortcomings and inconsistencies?

Will determine environmental compatibility with your company (for example – do they let little things bother them or only true concerns). This is also indicative of perceived accountability based upon how objectively they address these issues. The answer will alert you as to whether the candidate thinks before he/she speaks (judgement) since it is very easy to subjectively criticize previous employers when asked.

4. Tell me about a big project that you had to plan for school/work. What steps were involved? What was the outcome?

Identifies ability to plan tasks in a logical, well thought-out manner.

5. Describe a situation in which you had several things to do in a limited amount of time. What led to the situation and how was it resolved?

Identifies an ability to prioritize and multi-task.

6. Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with an irate client. What caused the incident/how was it resolved? How could it have been avoided?

Candidate's response will show any customer relations skills and an (in)ability to remain calm under pressure. Did they learn from the incident to try and avoid the situation if possible?

7. How have you helped resolve a group problem? What caused the problem and what was your specific role with regards to its resolution?

The applicant should be able to clearly outline how they worked as part of a team, took it upon themselves to complete an assignment that linked to another group member's responsibilities that, together, effectively resolved the problem.

8. Describe an incident when you had to take charge and "start the ball rolling" to get a job done. What were the ramifications if the job wasn't finished? What did you do/how did it turn out?

Verifies the candidate's ability to take initiative and be proactive when necessary.

- 9. Tell me about a time when you had to finish a job although others had given up. What were the chain of events that caused it and how did you manage to finish the job?**

Look for a satisfactory level of commitment to their work.

- 10. What suggestion(s) have you made to your last employer that saved time, resources or money? What prompted the idea? How did you present it to the boss?**

Answer should determine if candidate is resourceful and conscious of bottom-line, and if they can "think on their feet."

- 11. Tell me about a time when you had to learn something new in a short amount of time. What created that situation? What did you have to learn and how did you learn it?**

Verifies an ability to learn on the job and assimilate new information quickly.

- 12. How would you grade your ability to predict needs before they arise? Or...Tell me about an experience you had in which you miscalculated the way that the work was headed. How did you recoup and get back on track?**

Ensure that the candidate has some "organizational forecasting ability" to create a smooth workflow.

- 13. Tell me about the last time a client went out of their way to recognize you for going above and beyond the call of duty. What was the situation and why did you put forth the extra effort? What was the boss' reaction?**

Verifies that the candidate is willing to go the extra mile to satisfy a guest or client.

- 14. In what areas do you typically have the least amount of patience at work?**

Most candidates will respond with answers that imply they only get impatient with themselves. Follow up with the questions below to in-depth responses:

- What is it like working with you? What should I expect on a day-to-day basis?
- How much structure should I be prepared to give you?
- How do you expect me to delegate work to you? Will you come to me asking for more work or will you expect me to come to see if you're ready to assume additional responsibilities?
- How do you plan to keep me "in the loop" in terms of what's going on in your area?

- 15. What would you say is your communication style when dealing with upper-level management, guests, and peers? Does it vary significantly depending upon the 'audience?' If so, why?**

Shows an ability to communicate with a diverse group of people.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR Office Administrator/Manager POSITIONS:

- 1. What motivates you to lead others? Why is this a driving force behind your desire to be/stay in a leadership role? What do you like least about leading others?**

Effective leaders will mention developing a team to make their job easier – everyone working together to accomplish overall company objectives. The best bosses play only to win, with and through their people. They also really care about their subordinates, disliking disciplining or reprimanding them but willing to do so if it's needed for the team's success.

- 2. Give me an example of your ability to facilitate progressive change within your department or organization. Lead me through the steps it took to accomplish this.**

Your focal point in assessing a candidate's response will target HOW the individual achieved buy-in for the new programs.... did they help subordinates achieve "ownership" of the projects?

- 3. How do you typically stay in the information loop and monitor your staff's performance?**

You hope to hear that he knows which subordinates need what level of management, adjusts accordingly, generally knows who's doing what, makes himself available, and employs some variation of "management by walking around."

- 4. Tell me how you have handled making an unpopular decision or announcement.**

The candidate should indicate that they acted thoughtfully and diplomatically but cared more about getting the job done than being liked.

- 5. What have you done when faced with a decision not covered by policy or company precedent?**

Indicative of an ability to "think on their feet" and be decisive. Candidate should say they evaluated options available under similar circumstances and made the decision they thought most appropriate to that particular situation; to resolve the issue.

- 6. If you had to grade yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being you're a strict disciplinarian, 5 being you avoid confrontation whenever possible), where would you fall on the spectrum? What is it about you that makes you a 3? Tell me about the last time that you had to "show your teeth" and turn into a 1.**

Verify that candidate knows when it is appropriate to confront lagging performers and how. The key lies in allowing them to paint a picture of the circumstances and explain the necessity for taking such a strong course of action.

7. What have you done to reduce your department's operational costs or to save money?

Individuals who are not very proactive will struggle with this one. However, those who take initiative and like challenges will have answers readily available.

8. Describe a leadership situation that you would do differently if you could do it all over again.

Ensure that the candidate can learn from his/her mistakes by evaluating other alternatives thoroughly.

9. How would your supervisor grade your ability to cope with last-minute change without breaking stride? Tell me about the last time that you felt as if you were over your head. Was it the changing priorities at work that made you uncomfortable, or was there some other reason?

Determine a candidate's ability to multi-task and adapt to changing responsibilities by setting priorities.

10. Relate a time when a decision you made was over-ridden by your boss? Did you ultimately agree with his/her decision?

Indicative of maturity-level and ability to accept criticism, others' authority.

11. What are your current management priorities and what steps are you taking to facilitate change? How will the results be measured?

Do the priorities make sense based upon what the resume says their responsibilities are? Verify that their ability to set objectives is based upon quantifiable criteria.

12. Tell me about a situation in which you had to "go to bat" for one of your subordinates? What caused you to have to take a stand and how was it resolved?

Determine that the candidate will have the confidence to stand up for a staff member when necessary.

13. What type of employee do you find most difficult to manage?

Because the most effective managers are proactive, quick-paced and decisive, they'll typically find reactive, reserved, and extremely structure-oriented subordinates the hardest to handle.

14. How do you know you're doing a good job?

Candidates who are self-confident and motivated by success will say that advancing quickly, making good money, and achieving dept/company objectives is their measurement of success (most won't mention "pats on the back" from their boss).

15. Have you ever had to terminate an employee? What were the circumstances and how did you handle it?

You hope to hear the applicant acted quickly, fairly and decisively, confronting the employee and problem directly in an appropriate time frame.

Questions for all candidates – any competencies

- Has anyone ever accused you of messing something up because you couldn't _____?
_____?
- Have you ever had to replace someone for not having the skills to _____?
_____?
- Which past Boss was best at _____?
- When you have received formal or informal feedback, what did it say about your ability to _____?
- Have you ever managed a project with team members from other offices/practices?
- Tell me about a time when you had a project dropped on you that you'd never done before.
- Our hours are 8-5 - What do you feel is late?
- What is a satisfactory attendance record?
- Name the top 3 considerations to you in accepting a new job.
- Currently, are you considering employment with any other firms/companies?
If yes, where does the opportunity with ABC firm rank?
- How would you grade your ability to predict needs before they arise?
- What are a couple of your larger mistakes?
- Have you ever had a boss you just couldn't work for?
- People don't come with an instruction manual – tell me the first three headings in the chapter on how “you/applicant” likes to be managed?

**For more information about effective hiring practices and employee selection programs, call:
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