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Hiring Techniques for Law Firms: How to Effectively Interview and Hire

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When hiring, the conversations do not have to be strictly an evaluative process. It's a back-and-forth dialogue between both parties where each person understands that the discussion, at the end of the day, is conditional. However, there is a difference between what is and what is not suitable and what can and cannot jeopardize the reputation of the firm that is hiring.

A "friend" recently interviewed for a Business Development Specialist position at a "boutique" law firm where a series of questions were asked that violated several [Federal, State, and County Laws, Commissions, and Acts](#).

The Job Post

A "friend" found the following post listing on LinkedIn:

"We're looking to hire a Business Development Specialist who can not only create, but implement strategies in business development, marketing, and communications. The responsibilities include assisting in all efforts pertaining to business development, email blasts, client communication, social events, and community outreach."

The "Preferred but not required" section consisted of wanting a college graduate and someone who is bilingual.

Salary was commensurate with experience.

The "friend," who felt she was an excellent candidate, applied.

Within 48 hours, she received a request for an interview. A few days later, the "friend" arrived at the firm for the interview.

The Interview

The candidate has her initial interview with an associate who's been delegated the task of hiring. The associate begins the interview asking how her day was and what her current position is at the current company where she works. As soon as she finishes her sentence, the associate asks, "how much do you want?" Puzzled, the candidate then replies, "I can't answer that without knowing the duties and responsibilities of the position." He then realizes he skipped that step in the process and goes over a vague description of what the position includes. He describes the Business Development Specialist position as:

Someone who guides the outsourced marketing teams. Someone who can analyze where qualified leads and unqualified leads are coming from within their website. Someone who can evaluate the firm's spending habits and negotiates with vendors. Someone who can create several community-outreach campaigns. Someone who is creative. Someone who can take photos. Someone who is organized. Someone who is a go-getter. Someone who is available. Someone who's willing to put in the time and effort into their job. Someone who doesn't become complacent in their position.



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He then continues to describe how the boutique has had several marketing managers who would reach a plateau and then become stagnant in their position.

She, of course, meets all of the above requirements, plus more, and really enjoys the idea of the position. The interview continues with the associate asking if she is capable of such tasks. She smiles and replies with yes. The dialogue continues with the exchange of ideas she has for the firm. He then asks her again, "how much will it take to work here?" She replies with, "because of my x-amount of experience, my education, and the average cost of living in this area, my target salary is \$55,000 for the year." She then continues with explaining that she is an ambitious woman who doesn't take failure as an option. She confides in him that she is a workaholic, because she values her image and her work ethic. He, of course, enjoys everything that she says and decides to pull the partners of the firm and the office manager. This is when things became interesting.

They introduce themselves and begin the questioning.

- Why are you worth \$55,000.00?
- How old are you?
- Are you married?
- Do you have kids?
- What kinds of distractions do you have?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are you currently making?
- Asks about another 7 times, what are you currently making?
- How much website design experience do you have?
- How much Photoshop experience do you have?
- Can you write well?
- What makes you ambitious?
- What sets you apart?

The Aftermath

Needless to say, she replied to every question and ended the interview flustered and confused. Here is the general breakdown of the above mentioned.

1. The initial job post never mentioned required experience, nor was it very informative.
2. The associate and the partner of the firm had two different ideas of what the position entailed.
3. There was no standard to what the position required.
4. Several of the questions asked were inappropriate and illegal.

As a law firm, regardless of practice area, all personnel involved in any step of the hiring process should be made aware of prohibited practices.



Hiring Tips and Tricks

The hiring process does not have to be difficult as long as the following are adequately completed:

1. Hiring policies and procedures are written out
2. Each position is outlined with duties and responsibilities
3. The job posting is written in detail with expectations
4. Questions asked are relevant to the position and unbiased
5. Every candidate is evaluated against the standards proposed

Automating the Hiring Process

Let us be serious, we all have unfinished task lists to do longer than we'd care to admit. By automating the hiring process, [we can omit its bothersome components](#), hopefully knocking off some of your to-do list's segments, as well. If you haven't heard of Google's extension named Streak, I need you to get on it. Streak allows you to save email templates and share it amongst your team. With that, it also provides you with a time stamp of every time someone views the email.

With Streak, you're able to label all appropriate emails relevant to the hiring process (or any process) so it's as simple as the following:

Hiring – Phone Screening,

Hiring – First Interview,

Hiring – Rejection Email for XYZ,

Rejection Email for ABC,

Hiring – Second Interview, etc.

Another tip is using Google's Surveys to create an interviewing scorecard for each separate interview step. This allows you to ask the same questions so you're able to accurately compare candidates without bias.

Example sections and questions are as follows:

Introductory Questions:

1. Was the candidate on time?
2. Was the candidate on their phone when you entered the conference room?
3. How was the candidate's introduction of themselves?
4. Did the candidate understand the duties and responsibilities of the position he/she applied for? (numerical scale)
5. Did the candidate know what the different practice areas of the firm? (numerical scales)

Deep Dive Questions:

1. What are your core values and why?
2. What are your personal standards of success in your job? How were these standards implemented?
3. What motivates you to do a well-done job?
4. How are you misunderstood? (Here we're looking to see if they're very serious or a jokester, etc)
5. How do you feel appreciated in a work environment?

6. What are highpoint and low points in law school?

Confirmation Questions:

1. Walk me through a typical day in your previous job.
2. What were your responsibilities in your previous role?
3. When we contact your last employer for a reference check, how will he/she rate your performance on a 1-10 numerical scale?
4. What will your last employer say are your greatest strengths? What about your biggest areas requiring improvement?
5. What were your biggest mistakes in law school/ previous job and how did you learn from it?
6. What's next for you professionally? What is your next goal?

Overall Evaluation:

1. What was the candidate's salary expectations?
2. Was the candidate comfortable during the interview? (numerical scale Answers)
3. Was the candidate eager to learn?
4. Was the candidate humble when answering questions about themselves?
5. Did the candidate interrupt the interview?
6. Was the candidate coachable?

Conclusion

Regardless of hiring recruiters or doing the hiring in-house, those who are conducting the interview must understand what can and cannot be asked. Hiring recruiters is an alternative (and can be a pricey one as well), but conducting the interview and making such hiring decisions is up to you and your law firm. The process does not have to be difficult, but failure to have any system in place can be detrimental to your firm.

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