THE CALL-BACK INTERVIEW

WHAT’S A CALL-BACK?

A call-back interview is strong indication of interest by an employer. You have clearly made a positive impression and 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 call-back is to see how you act in the office, interacting with multiple office members in a variety of different settings, to decide if that elusive “fit” exists. 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 do your research, then relax and be yourself.

Also, remember, you are interviewing the firm at the same time 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.

CALL-BACK LOGISTICS

Once you receive notice from the employer about a call-back, acknowledge receipt of their message as soon as possible. Then, set up the call-back as soon as your schedule permits.

1. **Scheduling:** 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 call-back for the same city, try to set up both interviews for the same trip (firms prefer this because they can share expenses this way—more on this subject below).

2. **Length:** Generally the call-back lasts several hours, two to four is typical. It will often include a lunch as well if you are interviewed in the morning or dinner or after work drinks if you are interviewed in the afternoon. Be sure to ask the following:
   a. How long the call-back will take, how many interviews you will have and if there is anything else the call-back will entail;
   b. The names of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting;
   c. If you have a preference for a practice area, whether you can meet with attorneys from that group;
   d. Directions for driving, parking or public transportation; and
   e. Whether any additional information is needed from you.

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1 The Office of Career Planning is indebted to UC Hastings College of the Law’s Office of Career & Professional Development for their permission in adapting their “Call Back Interview” handout for our use.
3. **What to Expect:** Preparing for a call-back is like preparing for a marathon. Expect a long day and a busy office setting. While you are interviewing, staff might interrupt with an urgent message or need the attorney to take a necessary phone call. Don’t let it disturb you. Disruptions can provide a welcome break, giving you time to relax and scan the office. Maybe you’ll see some office decoration, a photo, or memorabilia, which will spark a comment or question such as, “I noticed you have several photos from Thailand. Did you take them? I’ve been to Thailand.”

**CALL-BACK RESEARCH**

Do more research than you did for the screening phase. The following are possible sources for additional information on employees:

1. **Dig deep into firm website.** Read press releases, practice area summaries, highlights of successful cases, know their biggest clients, and research each attorney you are scheduled to meet. Don’t forget to Google the firm!

2. **Surveys.** Make sure you check the student summer surveys (available on www.USFLawLink.com). Consider contacting the student who completed the form to ask follow-up questions.

3. **On-line databases.** Martindale Hubbell (www.martindale.com) and West Legal Directory (www.wld.com) can both provide useful information about the professional background of attorneys with whom you’ll be speaking. In addition, both Lexis and Westlaw have news databases which allow you to search for recent news articles about various legal employers. On Westlaw you can also search for cases in which a particular firm has appeared. On Lexis you can search for securities filings a firm has made on behalf of its clients.

You can also check the NALP Directory for snapshots of law firms, lawyer demographics, diversity, hours and lifestyle, and many other areas of interest: http://www.nalpdirectory.com/index.cfm.

For nationally-ranked firms, consult Chambers & Partners to get summaries of different groups within firms: http://www.chambersandpartners.com/USA. Also review Chambers Associate for information on working in specific firms: http://www.chambers-associate.com/.

4. **Alumni.** Find out if there are USF alumni at the firm. Consider placing a call to recent graduates to ask about their work, level of responsibility, firm culture and client contact.

5. **Law review or law journal articles.** Students have reported that a wonderful way to flatter interviewers is to have skimmed articles they have written (check Martindale Hubbell or the firm website) and to have a discussion about it.
INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR THE CALL-BACK

1. **Sounding like a broken record is a good thing.** The call-back is really just a string of screening interviews back-to-back. The key is to transmit essentially the same package of information to each person with whom you meet. If you have one anecdote which is a particularly good illustration of your interpersonal skills, try to weave that story into each interview. At all costs, 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.

2. **Be conscious of your energy level.** Consider the call-back 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 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! It is okay to ask for a bathroom break between interviews, which is the perfect time to munch on an energy bar.

1. **The call-back is all about FIT.** As mentioned above, the screening process resolved the issue of your competence to do the work. The call-back is the opportunity for the attorneys to see how you fit into their office. Small talk also plays a role; your interview continues while you are walking from one office to the next, so strike up a conversation when being walked to your next round. But remember, you are also evaluating the firm - it’s up to you to decide if this is a place you can work.

2. **Be nice to support staff.** Your behavior toward support staff is frequently factored into the 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 the decision-making process.

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

6. **Prepare for your weakness.** Know the question you dread the most and be prepared for it! In the same way, determine what question you wish they would ask you, and make sure you get that information across. Our Directors are happy to sit down and brainstorm with you on appropriate responses to these questions.

7. **Avoid negativity.** Keep your comments on a positive upbeat level, whether speaking about past employers, course work or any other subject. If there are past experiences in your background which were unpleasant, think ahead of time of a way to describe them in a positive light. For example, instead of focusing on why you didn’t accept an offer...
from a past employer (“I really didn’t get any responsibility…the atmosphere was cold and unfriendly…”), talk instead about what you are looking for in an employer (“I learned from last summer that I really thrive on a lot of responsibility. That’s one reason I was attracted to your office. I realized that a collegial environment is also very important to me.”)

8. **Be discrete.** Be careful about sharing or volunteering information that would not be an asset to your candidacy. Do you plan on only staying at the firm for a few years then going in-house? If so, you might want to avoid sharing that when asked about long range plans. Also, if discussing cases you worked on, remember you may be bound by attorney-client privilege not to reveal certain information, especially if the case is on-going.

**HANDLING THE CALL-BACK MEAL**

If your call-back involves lunch, dinner or a cocktail reception, be prepared to engage in more casual, get-to-know-you conversation. BUT never forget that the meal *IS* part of the interview. It is another 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 the meal will be evaluated in the hiring decision. If the conversation stays on non-business topics, go with it. Remember to remain professional but know it is okay to discuss hobbies, vacation plans, movies, current events and other topics as the attorneys wish to get a feel again for your “fit” with the firm.

**TIPS FOR THE CALL-BACK MEAL:**

1. **Etiquette.** Often, you will be taken to an upscale restaurant with formal place settings and dizzying array of silverware. Once seated, immediately place your napkin on your lap. Your water glass will be on your right, your bread plate on your left. If you are unfamiliar with which piece of silverware to use, watch your companions but typically, you start from the outer set of silverware then move in for each course. Our office can also assist you with an individual meal etiquette session. Just schedule an appointment!

2. **Ordering.** Before the wait-person returns, ask what your companions are ordering. If they are ordering appetizers, also order an appetizer, otherwise you will be sitting there eating nothing while everyone else is eating. Be sure to select courses that are easy to eat, have low likelihood of splattering on you (like spaghetti sauce) and will not give you bad breath or leave you with remnants between your teeth. DO NOT order the most expensive thing on the menu.

3. **Courses.** Likewise, if after the main meal the attorneys order dessert and coffee, do the same. You do not need to actually eat the dessert if you are full or drink your coffee or tea, but you want to have something in front of you while they are continuing to eat and drink.
4. **Alcohol.** Avoid alcohol even if your lunch companions order drinks. Stick with iced tea, soda, or lemonade. If they insist that you order alcohol, order white wine (again, in the event you spill, it won’t stain) and you don’t have to drink it all. Taking a few sips is fine.

**WRAPPING UP**

1. **Always ask about next steps.** 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 will often meet with you at the end of the day. You can 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 on-campus screening interview whether 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. If you are unable to see that person, send a thank you e-mail informing them of your call-back.

3. **Send hand-written thank you notes within 24-48 hours of the call-back.** Either write a separate, error-free and different thank you card for each interviewer with whom you met, or write one letter to the person with whom you established the best rapport, mentioning the names of your other interviewer and “cc’ing” the recruiter. You can always leave voice mail messages of thanks with the other attorneys. For a sample thank you note, see our *Cover Letters and Other Job Search Correspondence* handout.

4. **Follow-up.** If you do not hear back from the firm in the time-frame they indicated, it is appropriate to contact the recruiting coordinator to inquire about the status of their hiring decisions.

5. **Contact your OCP counselor** regarding how it went and your next steps.
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA LAW FIRMS
LAW STUDENT INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES
(updated annually by BALRA – the Bay Area Legal Recruitment Association)

Most Bay Area law firms that are members of BALRA have adopted the following interviewing guidelines (Guidelines) to assist law students with their interviews in the San Francisco Bay Area. These Guidelines will govern travel expenses during the Fall Recruitment season. Unless otherwise stated, these Guidelines will apply to both the San Francisco and Silicon Valley office of each signatory firm. Please note that these Guidelines are intended to supplement, rather than replace, the NALP guidelines. These guidelines are updated annually, so check with the Office of Career Planning for the latest version.

1. **RESPONSE TIME:** Please respond to any invitation to visit a firm within ONE week of receiving the invitation. Late responses may prevent other qualified candidates from scheduling visits.

2. **CANCELLATION:** If it becomes necessary to cancel or reschedule an interview date, a minimum of three (3) days notice is requested to facilitate possible use of that interview time by another student. If a student cancels his airline flight, he will be required to pay any costly penalties.

3. **EXPENSES INCURRED BY LOCAL STUDENTS:** Students attending Berkeley, Davis, Golden Gate, Hastings, McGeorge, Santa Clara, Stanford or USF will be reimbursed for local travel expenses at the discretion of the interviewing firm. Contact the firm directly regarding their reimbursement policies.

4. **REQUESTING REIMBURSEMENT:** A student must submit to the host firm a written, itemized request for reimbursement. Most firms will request that you utilize the NALP Travel Expense Reimbursement Form when submitting your expenses. This form can be found at [http://www.nalp.org/uploads/2011FillableTravelExpenseForm.pdf](http://www.nalp.org/uploads/2011FillableTravelExpenseForm.pdf). A request for reimbursement should include original receipts for all items. All reimbursement requests **must be submitted within 30 days** of the date of your interview with the host firm.

5. **FOLLOW UP/POST INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE:** Students should notify employers and the Office of Career Planning of their acceptance or rejection of employment offers by the earliest possible time and within the deadline as stated in the offer letter.

6. **LAW SCHOOL TRANSCRIPTS:** Law school transcripts aid employers considerably when comparing a student’s interests with their course backgrounds. Transcripts also assist employers in verifying a student’s academic accomplishment.
   a. When applying to BALRA member firms, students may submit either a copy of their official law school transcript or an unofficial grade sheet. The Office of Career Planning can assist you in preparing an unofficial grade sheet.
   b. Students should bring a copy of their official transcript to their on-campus interview (OCI) if they did not already submit a photocopy of their official transcript or an unofficial grade sheet with their application.
   c. If a student accepts a summer offer from a BALRA firm, the student’s file will be considered incomplete until a photocopy of their official transcript has been received. Firms may request an official copy of an applicant’s transcript at any time.