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## Law Firm Interviewing: There IS A Better Way!

**NANCY M. BERRY  
NALP CONFERENCE  
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Firms Researched

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- Lovells LLP
- Olswang LLP – mid-size UK law firm
- Bain & Company
- McKinsey & Company
- Accenture
- Mid-sized Business/IT Consulting firm
- KPMG LLP
- Ernst & Young LLP
- Deloitte
- Grant Thornton LLP

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Why Make Interviews More Rigorous?

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Improve your ability to select the best candidates for your firm

- Reduce cost of hiring mistakes
- Reduce unwanted attrition
- Measure candidates' ability to perform actual functions of the job
- Add measure of objectivity to the process
- Add more tools to the selection process toolbox
- Transcripts less useful/reliable
  - Law schools eliminating meaningful grades
  - Grade inflation

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**6 Commonalities**

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1. **Perspective on Talent Management**
2. **Thorough Analysis of Success Profiles/Development of competencies**
3. **Case Studies**
  - o 1 on 1 on the fly
  - o 1 on 1 w/ time to prepare
  - o Group case study with other applicants
4. **Fewer and More In-Depth Interviews**
5. **Behavioral Interviewing**
6. **Extensive Interviewer Training**
  - o Behavioral interviewing
  - o Unintended bias

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**Assessment Tests**

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**Types of Assessment Tests**

- > Writing Test
- > Critical Thinking Assessment Test (Watson-Glaser)
- > Numeric/Verbal Reasoning Tests
- > Personality/Cultural Fit Test
- > Honesty/Integrity Test
- > 2-3 hour Behavioral Interview with an organizational psychologist

**Considerations When Implementing Assessment Tests**

- > Use with ALL candidates
- > Be sure tests are valid and reliable

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**Lovells LLP**

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**Recruiting Goal**

- > Show candidates what practicing law will be like through workshops on-campus and case studies
- > Measure candidates ability to perform actual functions of the job during the interview process.

**Current process involves 4 assessment tools**

- > Application Form
- > Critical Thinking Assessment Test
- > Case Study
- > Behavioral Interviews

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**Application Form Questions**

- Give details of how you spend your extra curricular time, including your contribution to any clubs/societies. For a least one of these explain the benefits you derive from this activity.
- Describe a position of responsibility you have held. What did you learn about yourself and your impact on others?
- By reference to other careers, explain why law would be your chosen career.
- What aspects of your character and/or experience do you think make you particularly suited for a legal career with a firm like Lovells?
- If you have taken a gap year, or intend to take a gap year, please tell us how you have, or intend to spend this time. Please limit your answer to 100 words.
- If there are any gaps in the timeline of your application, for example between employment positions or education please detail what you did. Please limit your answer to 100 words.

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**Assessment Day (10 a.m. – 4 p.m.)**

- **Watson-Glaser critical thinking test**
- **Case study in group setting**
  - 5-8 candidates participate
- **2 behavioral interviews with partners from recruiting panel**

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**Results**

- **Link competencies evaluated in the interview to evaluation process for trainees and over time, they have been able to validate that the strengths and weaknesses identified in the interview process played out in the trainee's work**
- **Anecdotal comments from partners re: improvement in caliber of candidates**
- **UK law firm competitors have since included additional assessment tests in their candidate evaluation process**

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**Ernst & Young LLP**

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**Old system = 3 30 -40 minute interviews**

**New system implemented 2 years ago**

- How do we most effectively assess the plethora of candidates available to us?
- Analyzed top performers to identify characteristics of success and recruit based on these characteristics
- Introduced a writing test, case study and behavioral interviews
- Created a tool to rank candidates
- Training increases consistency of evaluation process

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**Case Study Interview**

- Trained case study interviewer
- 20 minutes to review case material
- Blank sheet of paper to make notes
- Interviewer asks 2-3 questions so candidate can share how he/she would approach the case

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**Writing Test**

- 30 minutes to type 1 page response to one of three questions
- Questions assess a core competency: project management, leadership, teamwork, communication
- Train one person to evaluate all candidates' writing samples in each "practice group"
- Assessed on understanding of the topic, did they answer the question, style and form, grammar and punctuation, etc.

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**Competency-themed behavioral interviews**

- 30-45 minute interviews on 1-2 topics
  - Eliminates candidate having same discussion with multiple interviewers
  - Allows for more in-depth discussion on meaningful topics related to firm's competencies

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**Ranking Candidates**

- Total number of points awarded to each of 4 interview components
- Each component weighted evenly
- Not ranking candidates against one another
- Another tool in selection toolbox

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**Results of New Approach**

- Interviewers appreciate having new evaluation tools available to them
- Anecdotal reports from partners
- Metrics - TBD

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**Bain & Company**

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**Who is Bain?**  
Top global strategic management consulting firms

**Who do they recruit?**  
Consultants from MBA, Ph.D. and J.D. programs

**Recruiting Philosophy?**  
People are our greatest asset – without them, we have nothing to offer so our investment in recruiting is significant.

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**Bain & Company**

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**Recruiting Goal**

- > Looking for people who can be successful right from the start
- > Identify the best among an incredibly highly accomplished group of applicants who are well prepared for interviews

**Solution**

- > Case studies
- > Targeted behavioral interviews
- > Constant analysis of why consultants succeed and fail to refine hiring tactics and strategy
- > Analyze data re: interviewers and candidates

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**Bain & Company**

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**Track Candidate Data Trends**

- > GPA in undergrad and grad school, GMAT scores, undergrad school, majors, activities, work experience, etc.
  - o Ex. Low GPA and high test scores = lack of motivation but raw intelligence?
  - o Ex. High GPA and low test scores = highly motivated hard worker lacking raw intellect?
  - o Ex. Undergrad GPA more reflective of intellect than grad school

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## Slide 17

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**NB1** Goal: o Bain can see likelihood of candidate's success and candidate understands what he/she is getting themselves into

NANCY BERRY, 4/16/2010

**Bain & Company**

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**Interviewer Assessment**

- Track interviewers ability to predict success of candidates based on who gets offers, who succeeds when they join the firm
  - What makes strong interviewers good at identifying the best candidates?
  - Videotape interviewers and provide feedback
    - Talk more than other interviewers, best-in-class interviewer tests 7 of 10 competencies and you only test 3 of 10, etc.
  - Interviewee evaluates interviewer
    - Did you feel challenged? Did you like Bain/not like Bain? Did you have a good rapport with your interviewer?
  - Training
    - Required training annually at junior level; refresher course when more senior.
    - Includes watching someone conduct an interview

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**Bain & Company**

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**Interview Process: 2 rounds**

- On-campus: 2 40-45 minute interviews, primarily case-based
- In-office: 2 case-based interviews and 1 behavioral-based interview

**Candidate Assessment**

- Based on consultant evaluation form
- Behavioral interviews, case studies and interview evaluation form based on consultant evaluation form

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**Case Study**

- Assess candidate's ability to be structured, logical, communicative, enthusiastic
- Interviewers paired based on complementary case studies
  - Interviewers' cases screened in advance
  - Final round of interviews: Pair with interviewers who can best probe the areas that may be weaknesses
- "Resume cases"

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## Diversity

- **Training**
  - Covers unintended biases, halo/horn effect, etc,
- **Objective measurements lower risk of discrimination**
- **Case study topics need to be fair**
  - Ex. Business case about a luxury ski resort
- **Measure metrics of diverse/non-diverse candidates**
- **Keep top-of-mind through training, conversation**

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## Preparing Students

- **Mock behavioral interviews/videotaping**
- **Mock case study workshops**
- **Practice assessment tests from websites**

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## To The Naysayers

"The current softball stock list of questions actually gives the students the impression that firms are not taking them seriously. I think they would appreciate the chance to show firms in a substantive way what it is they believe they can do for them. I think firms would come away with a much better sense of the candidate (in relevant ways) other than that the candidate is a decent 'fit.'"

- Terry Galligan – Assistant Dean, Career Development Office, University of California-Berkeley School of Law

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**Final thoughts...**

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**"Firms need to make candidates feel that they have invested something of themselves in the interview process and they will in turn be more dedicated to and invested in your organization."**

*- Dean Van Zandt, Northwestern University School of Law*

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**Final thoughts...**

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**"We've only had a handful of negative reactions from the hundreds of candidates who have taken our personality assessment test. In fact, many candidates said they appreciate the fact that we put so much effort into the interview process to make sure there is a good fit on both sides of the equation. When we implemented the assessment, it was a buyers' market; students had many employment options to choose from at that time. However, we didn't see any adverse effects on the number of candidates who were interested in us."**

*- Jennifer Queen, Chief Recruiting and Professional Development Officer, McKenna Long & Aldridge*

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**Final thoughts...**

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**"Consulting and accounting firms and investments banks use their interviews predominately to determine whether the candidate has the requisite skill set for the position for which she is applying. They ask complex questions with various fact patterns and scenarios that evaluate the candidate's judgment, leadership and analytical ability. Law firms, by contrast, use interviews primarily to determine whether the candidate is socially competent enough to carry on a conversation, "appears" intelligent and would be a "good fit." Although challenging in 20-30 minute interviews, law firms should consider implementing targeted questions to elicit responses focused on the requisite core competencies for successful lawyers."**

*- Law firm attorney contrasting her experience interviewing with top consulting, accounting and law firms*

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### Final thoughts...

"In this new economy, if a firm is hiring 15 summer associates, rather than 50, they might want to know that the candidate possesses the skills needed to hit the ground running and deliver to clients from the start. We have an opportunity to take the interview process to the next level by asking candidates to perform rather than just give their opinion of how they have performed. For example, by asking the candidate to review facts in a case and draft a memo during the call-back, the firm will have better "evidence" to determine whether or not this prospective candidate has what it takes to be successful at their firm. We need to move from "opinion" interviews to performance interviews!"

– Eva Wisnik, Founder and Principal, Wisnik Career Enterprises

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### Why Make Interviews More Rigorous?

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### Final Questions

Can we afford not to improve our interviewing process?

If not now, when?

If these other professional services firms can do it, why can't we? Why shouldn't we?

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