

How to Answer Difficult Questions in Interviews, for Recruitment and PD Professionals

By Eva Wisnik

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Over the past six months, there has been a surge of new recruitment and professional development roles in law firms. A few weeks into the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, we still have candidates interviewing. I am hopeful that opportunities will continue to arise! Knowing how to showcase your experiences and tell your story is an important skill for all legal professionals.

In my work as a recruiter, I have found that candidates are frequently asked and often struggle with these questions:

- Why are you interviewing with our firm?
- Why are you thinking of leaving your current job?
- What are you excited to bring to this opportunity?

Before we dive into what a good answer looks like for NALP members who may be interviewing, it is useful to explore why these questions are being asked. Once you understand the reason why interviewers are asking these questions, the better you can prepare compelling answers.

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Why are you thinking about leaving your current job?

Interviewers want to hear that you have legitimate reasons for seeking new opportunities, that these reasons are realistic and that the firm can meet them. A good answer sounds like:

“I have had a great experience at my current firm and would now like to focus more on...”

Why are you interviewing with our firm?

The purpose of this question is to see if you have done your homework and researched their firm, as well as why you are interested in this opportunity. A good answer sounds like:

“I noticed on your website that you are expanding in X area, and I am very interested in...”

What are you excited to bring to our opportunity?

They want to hear the skills, knowledge and competences you can contribute to the role. A good answer sounds like:

“I read on your job description that project management skills are highly valued for this role. I was able to further develop these skills when I...”

You may want to talk about the best practices you’ve developed or how you’ve launched new initiatives.

In addition to being prepared to answer difficult questions, you should be prepared with a very clear narrative. Your narrative should tell a compelling story that paints a clear picture of your experiences and how they have prepared you for this new role.

There are a few important factors to incorporate into your narrative that will distinguish you:

1. Your narrative must speak about all the places you have worked and people you have worked with in a positive light. For example, instead of saying your boss has no strategic vision, you’re much better off saying, “I’ve learned so much in my current role, and now it’s time for a new challenge where I can...”
2. Your story should include specific examples of what you’ve accomplished in your various roles. When preparing candidates for their interviews, I have heard some people tell me, “I’ve done a lot of things and I could handle anything that comes my way.” These generalities do not paint pictures that illustrate your capabilities and potential to the prospective employer. A more illustrative answer would be, “In the past year, I helped launch a series of training programs aimed at senior associates where I was able to use my legal

background and understanding of what clients need.”

3. Your narrative should provide a strong sense of what motivates you and how you have accomplished results in your previous jobs. For example, you may want to talk about the best practices you’ve developed or how you’ve launched new initiatives. If the interviewer can visualize the steps you’ve taken to achieve results, they will be able to envision how you could be most helpful to them. Prior to an interview, you may want to think of work accomplishments that you were extremely proud. Citing these examples will convey not only the results you achieved, but also the passion you have for your work.

Many of you are focused on making sure your attorneys and students have the skills needed to interview effectively. Take another step and make sure you have your skills brushed up and narrative ready, just in case a great opportunity arises. ■