

# A Law Student's Guide to Virtual In Firm Interviews

STEPS TO CONNECT, ENGAGE AND FIND  
THE RIGHT FIT... WITHOUT SETTING FOOT  
IN A LAW FIRM



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# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

WELCOME, LAW STUDENTS!

Congratulations!

You've made it to the next round of interviews!

I wrote the first version of this guide pre-pandemic. Back then, students explored different firms by meeting lawyers in person within their offices.

Things have changed: your in firm interviews have gone virtual.

But just because we connect through screens instead of in person doesn't mean we've changed who we are, what we want to do and why it matters.

You're starting your law career at a very unusual time. Now, more than ever, we need law students just like you to bring your ideas and talent to the legal profession.

For many of you, this will be your first law job. That is what we focus on here.

This guidebook will help you get clear about what you want to achieve as you start out your careers and what sets you apart from others .

Your interviews aren't just about getting a job. They're an opportunity to better understanding yourself and use that information to find a job you love.

Are you ready for that?

Let's get started!

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# TIP ONE

## START WITH YOUR VALUES

By now, you've probably done a lot of research.

You've studied law firm websites and student programs. You've spoken to students, lawyers, professional development directors at law firms and your law school career advisors. You're definitely on the right track.

But, there's one source of information that needs more attention than any of the others: you.

You may assume that you already know what you want. But, if you haven't taken the time to really explore that, now's a good time. I'll help you do that.

Let's start with your values. Most of us don't sit around thinking about them. Who has time for that?

But your values are powerful. When you know what they are, you can use them as a framework to make tough decisions. When you act in alignment with your values, things feel easy. When you don't, things feel hard.

Lawyers I work with who are well into practice have never done this exercise. Neither had I until many years in. I wish I had done it earlier. Once you know how to do it, you can go back to it anytime you feel like you need to realign. You may have diverted from your values; or, your values may have changed.

So, let's figure out what your values are. I've set out a number of values on page 5. There's room for you to answer questions on the following page. Pick your top five values. Write them down. Describe in one sentence what they mean to you. Rank them. Make some decisions. If it's hard, that's good. It means you're really thinking about what matters to you.

Once you've done that, consider how your values relate to what you want in a law firm.



# TIP ONE

## START WITH YOUR VALUES

Here are some questions you might ask yourself:

- Why did you go to law school and how is that relevant to what you want in a job?
- What's most important to you in your summer / articling student experience?
- What are three things you want to learn as a summer / articling student?
- Are you willing to accept less money for a lower billing target?
- Do you want more structure or more autonomy?
- Would you prefer to work in a smaller office or a larger one?
- Do you thrive in a competitive atmosphere or one that is less competitive?
- Do you want to work as part of a team or do you prefer working alone?

Ask yourself these questions now, before your next round of interviews. Then, when it comes to your interview, you'll understand yourself better and find it easier to answer questions about yourself.

### **What is "Fit"?**

You may hear the term "fit" and "culture" during interviews. All firms do legal work, but cultures vary widely. The culture reflects the core values of a firm. Some factors to consider are: size, tradition, compensation structures, client base, practice areas, regions of service, entrepreneurship, collegiality, hierarchy, billable expectations and approaches to training and mentoring. Some firms list their values on their firm website. The more you learn about the firm and the people who work there - including how they get along with each other, what they focus on and the work they do - the more you'll be able to assess whether a firm's culture aligns with your values. In other words, whether you're a "fit" for each other.

# TIP ONE

START WITH YOUR VALUES

## Values

Acceptance Excellence Perseverance  
Achievement Fairness Persistence  
Adventure Faith Personal Development  
Aesthetics Fame Physical Activity  
Ambition Family Pleasure  
Appearances Financial Security Playfulness  
Authenticity Forgiveness Power  
Autonomy Freedom Prestige  
Balance Friendship Practicality  
Beauty Fun Privacy  
Certainty Happiness Recognition  
Challenge Harmony Relationships  
Clarity Health Relaxation  
Collaboration Honesty Reliability  
Comfort Honor Religion  
Commitment Humor Responsibility  
Communication Independence Risk  
Community Influence Romance  
Companionship Integrity Rules  
Compassion Intelligence Security  
Competence Intimacy Self-Expression  
Competition Joy Self-Respect  
Confidence Justice Serenity  
Connection Kindness Service  
Contribution Knowledge Smart  
Control Leadership Social Causes  
Courage Learning Solitude  
Courtesy Logic Spirituality  
Creativity Love Strength  
Dependability Loyalty Teamwork  
Discipline Mastery Trust  
Diversity Money Truth  
Duty Nature Understanding  
Elegance Openness Variety  
Energy Order Vitality  
Enthusiasm Passion Wealth  
Environment Peace Wisdom



# WORKSHEET

YOUR VALUES

**QUESTION #1:** What are your top five values?

**QUESTION #2:** For each value, describe in one sentence what's important to you.

**QUESTION #3:** How does what you value influence what you want in a law firm?



# TIP TWO

## PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

When it comes to your interviews, preparing well will help you understand what you're looking for and help you present yourself with confidence. Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare:

1. Research the firm and its lawyers
2. Identify questions you expect to be asked
3. Prepare answers to those questions
4. Prepare questions you will ask the firm

### **1. Research the firm and its lawyers**

I assume you've done some of this already, but here are some ideas:

- Review the firm website. Look specifically for material concerning students, student programs, what qualities they look for in students and how to prepare for interviews. See if you can find information about the firm's values.
- If you have the names of your interviewers, look them up. Figure out what they've done: cases they've tried, deals they've closed, papers they've written. What's interesting to you about their work? What kind of questions can you ask them?
- Ask other students at your law school about the firm, particularly students who have summered or interviewed with the firm.

When you interview, try not to ask for information that you can find on the website. For example, rather than ask *"Do you offer a formal rotation or is the program more flexible?"* (unless that information truly isn't available) try asking *"I see your firm has a flexible program. What benefits does that offer students who summer? What challenges can they face?"* You get the idea. Ask next level questions. They're more interesting for your interviewers to answer and they show you've done your work. They also give you useful data for decision-making.





# TIP TWO

PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

## 2. Identify questions you expect to be asked

Interviewers ask questions to identify which candidates are most likely to succeed at their firm.

You've arrive at the "in firm" interview, which means you've already cleared a number of hurdles. So have other candidates.

This next level of interview is an opportunity for law firms and law students to get to know each other better; to narrow down and try to identify which students to make offers to (for law firms) and which offer to accept (for law students). Your job as a candidate is to figure out which opportunity aligns most closely with your goals and your values. The law firms have as their goal finding students who will thrive in the work environment they offer.

To do that, law firms often have hiring protocols that they follow to assess candidates objectively in relation to the criteria they're looking for.

The qualities law firms seek out in candidates vary from firm to firm. Firms may have a list of criteria they look for. Some common ones are: strong analytical skills, ability to solve problems, ability to communicate, attention to detail, good judgment, time management skills, strong work ethic, proven ability to finish what you start, ability to work as part of a team, high energy, a positive outlook, flexibility, integrity, a demonstrated interest in the work offered at a firm, grit and a willingness to learn.

It goes without saying that you'll be asked questions. Here are three places you can look to figure out what those questions might be:

- **Your application materials.** You will be asked questions about what you've done. Know your materials, have stories ready and prepare for any "red flags" you might need to address.
- **The firm's website.** What does the firm say about its values? What about testimonials from students who have worked there? What are the top 5 values of the firm – and what kind of questions would you ask yourself to see if you shared them?



# TIP TWO

PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

- **Behavioural questions.** Some law firms use behavioural questions during interviews. Look up examples on line. You'll understand what type of questions you might be asked, what the purpose of those questions is and how you can answer them.

### 3. Prepare answers to those questions

Now that you have created a list of questions, answer them. Look up the “STAR” method and consider how you frame your answers. Write out your answers. If you have the luxury of time, leave your written answers for a few days and go back and look at them. *Do you like what you see?*

Practice answering questions out loud. With another person, if possible. The goal is not to memorize a script that you can recite on autopilot. You know how engaging that is.

The goal is to be so comfortable with your materials and your answers - in other words, who you are and what you bring to the table - that you can engage with your interviewers naturally and confidently. When you have best stories ready to go, you can focus on the person on your screen instead of sifting through the recesses of your memory bank to find an answer a question.



# TIP TWO

PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

## 4. Prepare questions you will ask the firm

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who talks a lot about themselves and never asks you anything about you?

Exactly.

During your interviews, virtual coffees and any interactions you have with members of a firm during interviews, please carry your end of the conversation.

Come up with a few good questions. Go back to your values, the firm website, what you've learned by speaking with other members of the firm. Consider what else you want to know about the firm. Write down your questions and have them handy.

I know it can be hard to think up questions, let alone ask them. I was so shy as a law student, I really struggled with this. So I'll give you some ideas to get started.

- Ask your interviewers what brought them to the firm and what they appreciate about it.
- Ask for an example of a student or young lawyer who has been successful at the firm and what qualities have led to their success.
- Ask what challenges and opportunities they see for students in the new virtual work space.

Make sure you listen to the answers. Ask follow up questions. You're learning about your interviewers and about the firm.

Take this opportunity to build a rapport with lawyers you might someday work with, whether at the same law firm or on different sides of a file. Ask yourself what you want for your longer term relationship with them and approach your interview to achieve that.



# TIP THREE

## BUILD YOUR REPUTATION

At law school, you're already building your reputation among your peers and professors. During your interviews, I invite you to be intentional about the reputation you want to create for yourself.

This by no means is meant to scare you. It's an invitation to start thinking about your professional identity and what qualities you want to be known for.

Create a framework for yourself. Set some ground rules for yourself based on your values.

Here are some ideas to get started:

- (1) Be kind, courteous, polite, positive, respectful and gracious with everyone you meet.
- (2) Be truthful. Obviously.
- (3) Take it on yourself to make conversation. Conversation might be awkward on a screen, particularly a virtual social gathering. You may feel intimidated by the lawyers you meet, overwhelmed by the number of new faces or unsure about what etiquette rules apply on line. To engage with other, ask questions, share stories and – particularly if you're in a group – be sure to allow air time for everyone.
- (4) Send thank you emails to your interviewers. Include a detail or two about your conversation if you can. Try not to send the exact same message to lawyers at the same firm.
- (5) Be positive. That includes the way you speak about other students, teachers, other firms and past employers.
- (6) Don't miss any appointments. Be on time.





# TIP THREE

## BUILD YOUR REPUTATION

(7) If you rule out a firm absolutely, cancel any scheduled appointments with them as far in advance as you can. They will appreciate the courtesy of knowing where they stand so they can focus their attention on other candidates.

(8) If you receive an offer, be courteous in how you respond. You may need time to consider the offer; but, be mindful that the firm extending the offer may need to wait for your answer before it can extend an offer to another candidate.

(9). Show genuine interest in the people you meet. Listen to what they're saying. Let them finish their sentences.

(10). Maintain appropriate eye contact – as much as possible over Zoom.

(11) Ask open ended questions.

(12). Remember people's names.

When the dust settles, you can only pick one firm. As for the other firms you interview with during the process, you'll leave some sort of impression. Be intentional about what that impression is.



# TIP FOUR

## SWITCH SCREENS WITH YOUR INTERVIEWER

Have you ever planned a seating chart for a social event? If you plan for a dinner party, for example, you will likely need to think about who should sit where, what interests the guests have in common and how to balance the energy of the room. If guests are bringing food, you'll need to make sure they bring different things so you don't end up with too many apples and not enough dessert.

This is basically what law firms are doing when they hire students.

When I used to interview students (or potential new staff or lateral hires) a question at the back of my mind was how the person in front of me would integrate into the existing framework of the firm.

If you put yourself in your interviewer's shoes, what would you want to know? Here are some ideas to get you started.

### **Grades**

Grades traditionally offer firms somewhat standardized data about your proficiency as a student. In the pandemic environment, some students may not have law school grades to submit. The relative importance of grades depends on the firm. If you've been selected to interview, you've likely met the basic threshold. If you have low grades on your transcript, you may be asked questions about them. Be prepared to answer those questions. If your grades suffered because of illness or outside commitments, you can highlight that.

### **Work Ethic**

A strong work ethic goes a long way. You may be asked specific questions about your extra-curricular commitments (including the average number of hours per week) to assess your ability to manage various projects. Think about examples that show your ability to manage competing priorities, see a task to the end and overcome challenges.



# TIP FOUR

## SWITCH SCREENS WITH YOUR INTERVIEWER

### **Personality**

People like to work with people they get along with. How do you showcase your personality in the interview? Are you easy to speak with? Do you carry the conversation? Do you listen?

Interviews can be stressful, but so can the practice of law. Show by how you communicate in your interview that you are calm under pressure. You want to present as a student who can focus when the pressure's on, work in a team and respond well to feedback.

### **Trustworthiness**

Your ability to inspire trust is key to your work as a lawyer. Lawyers you work with need to trust you with their work and eventually with their clients. How do you demonstrate integrity and honesty? Your trustworthiness will be on your interviewer's mind – consciously or unconsciously – during any interview. Do what comes naturally to establish that trust.

### **Your commitment to the firm**

Firms have a limited number of spots to offer and it may help them to know where they stand with you. If a firm is your top choice, consider sharing that with one of the interviewers.

# TIP FIVE

## MIND THE PARSLEY

One of my favourite lawyers used to refer to boiler plate language in a contract as “parsley”.

It's not the main focus, but without it the contract is incomplete.

When it comes to interviews, there's a place for parsley.

Here are some (pandemic-friendly) tips:

1. Make sure you're comfortable with your technology. You want clear sound, a non-distracting background, a clear visual of your face and a decent internet connection. Set yourself up so there are no distractions.
2. Dress the part. These days you don't need to worry about matching your socks, but wear a suit and dress how you would if you were meeting in person.
3. Be on time. Find out what that means in your virtual interactions. You may need to log on a few minutes before the scheduled time.
4. Don't overschedule your days. Leave space to breathe between interviews. You might need to leave longer spaces for firms you really like in case your interview runs longer or you have an immediate opportunity to meet more lawyers.
5. Stand or sit up straight and look engaged. Try to look into the lens of the camera.
6. Spend time at the beginning with friendly chat. An in-person interview would normally start with a handshake and warmup conversation. Try to establish a connection with your interviewers through introductions and informal discussion when you "meet" on screen..



# TIP FIVE

## MIND THE PARSLEY

7. Be mindful of how you speak. If you can, practice with a partner and ask for feedback or record yourself speaking on your computer and watch what you do and how you sound. Some common things people do that distract from their message:

- **Speaking too fast.** Use spaces to emphasize a point or think about questions before you answer it.
- **Using non verbal fillers like “um”, “like”, “you know”, “so” and “and”.** If you watch yourself, you’ll identify them. Then you can train yourself to stop using them.
- **Failing to maintain eye contact.** In a virtual setting, this is tricky. You want your eyes to center as closely as possible on the person you’re speaking with. I like to centre images of people speaking beneath the lens of my laptop. This helps me keep my eyes focused straight ahead instead of to the side.
- **Interjecting too much.** I learned this lesson during my coach training. I tend to say “uh-huh” as people talk and make their points. It’s well intentioned, but it breaks the flow of the conversation, especially on Zoom where it can interrupt the audio. Instead of using non-verbal cues to show that you’re listening, simply listen. You can nod if you’re on Zoom.
- **Upspeaking.** Some peoples intonate their voice so that statements sounds like questions. This makes you sound less confident. Practice giving your sentences a firm ending followed by a short pause.

When you go into your interview, have clear goals about how you will carry yourself. For example, decide that you will speak clearly, pause before answering questions and use a warm tone.

8. Be polite, respectful and helpful.

9. Get as much sleep as you can.

# TIP SIX

## GO WITH YOUR GUT

Congratulations!

You've reached the final tip. You're almost done!

When you finish your interviews, you may have more than one job offer to choose from.

Your decision may be clear to you.

If it's not, go back to your values.

And if you still can't decide?

Trust your gut.

When you follow your values, your goals and your instincts, you'll find yourself exactly where you need to be.

Very best wishes in your interviews.





# RESOURCES

MORE INFO AND NEXT STEPS

Check out these resources to learn more interview tips and how we can work together this summer.

In September 2020 and January 2021, I had the pleasure of hosting webinars with Kimberley Ho, National Director, Professional Recruiting, at Borden Ladner Gervais LLP in Calgary, AB, and Andrea Rayment, Director of Professional Development at Clark Wilson LLP in Vancouver, BC, as they spoke about virtual law firm recruitment. You can access the recordings of these webinars along with other recorded webinars on my [Uplevel Lawyer Coaching Productions YouTube channel](#).

If you want help making the transition from law school to law firm, check out the summer programs I offer law students. Here's a link to my 2021 [Summer Student Boot Camp](#) and [Law Student Summer Program](#). I would love to see you there!



# NOTES

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