

Dos & Don'ts of Applying, Seeking, and Interviewing for Jobs

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Applying

- Many times being able to complete the application process is the first step to getting your foot in the door of a potential employer. It is a time to show off your talent by being able to follow directions and complete the application process successfully. So when reading a potential employer's advertisement, read and follow the ad instructions completely. Read it several times to ensure you have all of the facts.
- Don't quote the ad back to a potential employer insinuating their ad is wrong when perhaps you have not read it completely. Following all of the instructions in an ad will show a potential employer that you are able to follow instructions for potential work assignments.
- Don't have a potential employer call you at your current job! This can be perceived as disrespectful so make other arrangements.
- Don't have any background noise such as screaming kids, barking dogs or flushing toilets when speaking to a potential employer on the telephone.
- Don't sound like you are talking from a tin can when leaving a voicemail message for a potential employer. They need to hear your voice and grammar clearly without background noise.

Resumes

- If a potential employer is reviewing a stack of resumes you have 20 seconds at most to leave a lasting impression! The industry standard is to go back in time 10 years however if you do not have work experience within the past 10 years then include your prior history on your resume. If you want to express something on your resume prior to the 10 year mark consider bringing it up during the interview or your cover letter instead.
- Remember you are not limited to a resume to tell your entire story --- you have a cover letter, resume, portfolio, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews and beyond so use all avenues wisely to market yourself.
- Don't use colored or perfumed paper. Those end up in the trash immediately!
- Don't use a fill-in-the-blank Resume template and forget to take out the sections you are not completing [e.g. Smith, Inc. from 1999 to 2000 (City, State)]. Paying attention is key on any job and your Resume is your first work product a potential employer will review. First impressions are huge and lasting!
- Don't jump all over with the content of your resume, remember you are telling YOUR story so make it organized so that it flows and is consistent with what you are trying to convey.

- Don't use abbreviations on your resume and don't use any acronyms. Everything is to be consistent and spelled out so that a potential employer can clearly understand what you have written.
- Don't use funky email addresses such as "hotbabe@gmail.com". Create or use a professional email address when applying for jobs with a potential employer.
- Don't include an "Objective" on your resume. That section should be referred to as a "Career Summary" or something similar. This section is to be a 3-4 sentence well-thought out paragraph which is your time to market and sell yourself on your resume. Tell the potential employer why they should hire you!
- Don't forget to include your "Professional Affiliations" or "Professional Affiliations and Awards" section. This section can include any volunteer work you have done, organizations you are a member of, and any awards you have been given over time.
- Don't include a section that reads "References Available Upon Request". This is a given nowadays and a potential employer expects that you will provide references if you are selected as one of the candidates to be interviewed.
- If a potential employer has asked for your 'salary requirements' be careful what you put down. You may also want to include that the amount you have submitted is "negotiable" however, only use "negotiable" if it is truly negotiable and you want to be considered as a candidate for the position.
- Don't portray your skills to be top notch when in fact they may not even be average within the industry. An example of this is the average words per minute (wpm) to type are 60 wpm so do not market yourself as having the skills to type 40 wpm. This will clearly show a potential employer you do not have the average skills others will.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread your resume and have someone else proofread it as well. Read it out loud so you can see if your thoughts are well written. Spell check only will catch typos but will not catch mistakes that are written for purposes of content so proofreading is beyond important!

Portfolios

- A portfolio is an accumulation of information about yourself which can provide samples of your work product to a potential employer. It will leave a lasting impression as it will show a potential employer that you are prepared, have put serious thought into the application process, and that you have organizational and written communication skills.

What items could be included in a portfolio.

- Cover page, cover letter, resume - These items can be included up front in a portfolio to give a potential employer a clean hard copy version of what you may have already submitted online or otherwise, but in a professional manner face-to-face.
- Personal references – Contact all of your personal references while job searching and ask if they could be used for a reference. Include a separate page of reference with all contact information for your references. Name, Professional Title, Address, City/State/Zip, Telephone Number and Email Address. A potential employer should not have to ask for this information. To be taken as a serious candidate for a position walk in with these ready in hand to give to a potential employer.

- Letters of recommendations - These can be gathered from previous employers, school professors, internship employers, volunteer organizations, or colleagues.
- If you are in school include a copy of your transcript, letters of achievement, or a copy of a letter showing you are on the dean's list at your school.
- Job evaluations - Include your last two job evaluations only if they make you shine and there are items you want a potential employer to read.
- Recognition and training - Include certificates from training classes, thank you letters of praise, other miscellaneous items such as whether or not you are a notary.
- Writing samples – If you are a student include school papers (“A” papers only!), articles you have written, deposition summaries, medical evaluation summaries, and pleadings you have drafted. Be sure to redact out any private client information.
- Miscellaneous items – Have a miscellaneous section for special projects you may have accomplished over time. An example would be a system you developed (and have in hard copy form) for an employer that they may have not had before, and you were able to develop the process and system for their use even after you left the employer.
- Don't include anything with misspellings and anything that does not reflect good work product.
- Don't include upside down pages! Remember you are telling YOUR story so be sure to proofread and have someone else read through your portfolio to make sure the flow and content make sense.

Seeking

- When you are seeking a job, network, network, network! Networking is a major avenue to use to find out about employment opportunities that perhaps may not be public just yet.
- Join a professional organization in your industry to meet others and become involved in their activities.
- Brainstorm ideas of the who, what, where of potential employers you may be interested in. Start by looking in the yellow pages, legal directories, Martindale Hubbell, Company directories, Hoover.com and/or Google different industries to see what might be available.
- Reach out to recruiters or job placement services that can provide feedback on your resume, skill sets and what potential employers are looking for. Let them interview you and provide feedback on all of your skills.
- An updated and fresh LinkedIn profile is a FREE and easy way to promote yourself and let others know you are seeking a position. Consider your LinkedIn account to be the electronic version of your Resume so ensure they match.
- Research every possible location a job that could be posted including Craig's List, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Monster, and Indeed. Potential employers have many avenues online alone to post their jobs.
- Consider reaching out to a potential employer to do an internship to get experience, knowledge and your face in front of the right people.
- Word of mouth and a person reference for a position is priceless --- network, network, network!

- Keep yourself organized! Many times when job searching you have reached out to many employers. Keep a file on each position you have applied for, who you have spoken to, and when you spoke to them so you don't confuse the who, what, where and when's.

Interviewing

Before:

- Once you have landed an interview it is time to do your homework! Keep in mind an interview is two-way street. As much as the potential employer is interviewing you to see if you are a good fit, you as the interviewee are also interviewing the potential employer to see if their environment is where you want to be.
- Research the company in advance and be able to present a minimum of six questions that reflect you did your research on the company. This shows a potential employer you are truly interested in their company.
- Ask other professionals if they know of the reputation of the company, firm, office or agency you are about to interview with to see if there is hidden information that would be useful to you as a job candidate.
- Expect to be interviewed 2 to 3 times prior to any job offer. Expect to be interviewed by hiring teams as well.
- Take a copy of the job advertisement with you so you can ask questions directly from it.
- Have your one minute advertisement ready for the first question --- Tell me about yourself? Or tell me who the real (fill in your name) is? The potential employer is looking for a one to one and a half minute advertisement about yourself. Give them a brief background of who you are and what brought you to this job interview.
- Dress appropriately for the environment you have selected. If a potential employer has told you it is 'business casual' lean on the side of caution and dress up! Why? Because it may be the time they introduce you to the president of the company and business casual for that interaction may not be appropriate.
- Do not select distracting colors of clothing or nail polish during an interview.
- Be conscious of the environment you have selected to interview in. If you have facial piercings or visible tattoos be conscious to either remove the piercings and/or cover up the tattoos if appropriate. Some employers will not consider a candidate if they have either of these.
- Don't smoke or drink coffee prior to an interview especially together! These items leave a lasting scent on your clothing and person that can be hard to remove prior to an interview. Take breathe mints with you!
- Turn off your cell phone or leave it in your car --- THIS IS A MUST!
- Always arrive 10 to 15 minutes early for an interview. If you do not know where the employer is located, then drive to their offices the night before (or a few days before) so you know exactly where you are going. Always consider traffic delays while getting to their offices so leave with plenty of time to spare.

During:

- Non-verbal communication is extremely important during a face-to-face interview. The first minute will be the lasting impression you make on a potential employer. So be positive from the moment you hit the front door.
- Greet everyone with a smile as they could have a potential say in whether you are their future co-worker or may be your potential boss!
- Make eye contact during the interview and when spoken to.
- Don't slouch, sit appropriately during an interview. If there is a table you could lean in with hands crossed to show a potential employer that you are engaged in the conversation. Be careful if there is no table about crossing your legs as it sometimes can give a negative impression.
- Don't exaggerate your skills or what you are willing to do for a potential employer. For instance if an employer requires overtime everyday, do not tell them you are interested when in fact you are not.
- Be honest with yourself about your skills and whether or not the potential employer you have interviewed with are a good fit with the job requirements.
- Don't ask about salary or vacation policies during an initial interview. These discussions should be reserved for follow up interviews.
- Be sure to find out how to follow up with the employer either by phone or email. And be sure to find out what the time frame the employer is working with. Ask if it is okay to follow up with them in a week and so on.

After:

- Jot down notes so you will remember things that are fresh in your mind that took place during the interview so you can do a self-evaluation.
- Send a 'Thank You' note immediately. Personal hand written notes are preferable but if you and the potential employer have agreed to communicate by email then a note can be sent by email as well.
- Follow up with the employer at the agreed upon time you discussed during the interview.

About the Authors

Mindi Schaefer has thirteen plus years of litigation paralegal experience including extensive trial preparation experience. She received her Associate degree in legal assisting from Sinclair Community College, Bachelor degree in political science from Wright State University, and Master degree in communication and marketing from Franklin University. Mindi is also President-Elect, Public Relations Representative, and Mentoring Program Chair for the Paralegal Association of Central Ohio (“PACO”). She is currently the lead paralegal and marketing specialist at Poling Law in Columbus, Ohio. Mindi can be reached at (614) 737-2914 or mschaefer@poling-law.com.



Rebecca Cain has been in the legal industry for approximately 30 years and is currently employed as a Paralegal Supervisor at Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company, Office of the Chief Legal Governance Officer (OCLO), Litigation Employment Practice Group, Discovery Management Unit, Service of Process Team in Columbus, Ohio. She currently serves as the Vice President of the Paralegal Association of Central Ohio (“PACO”). Rebecca can be reached at (614) 677-0292 or cairn@nationwide.com

