

# The Second or “Callback” Interview

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Your first interview with a firm may be on-campus, over the phone, at an off-campus job fair, or at a firm’s office. If you succeed in making it past this round, you will be invited to a second interview, more commonly referred to as the “callback.” Be proud of yourself for making it to this stage!

Although the number of callback invitations varies among firms, typically a firm will invite 10 – 30% of those students initially interviewed on campus for callbacks. Similarly, callback to summer associate offer ratios are highly competitive. The percentage of callbacks resulting in summer associate offers for the most recent hiring season (Fall 2010) was 40.6%. This percentage was up from an industry low of 36.4% in Fall 2009. However, by comparison, percentages in earlier years were 46.6% in 2008 and 60.0% in 2007. (See NALP’s Perspectives on Fall 2010 Law Student Recruiting, which is available on-line at [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org).) **We anticipate that the number of summer associate offers that will result from callbacks will remain low during the fall of 2011 given many firms’ plans to hire a relatively small number of students for their 2012 summer programs.**

In short, being invited for a callback to contend for a summer associate position represents a great success. It indicates that the interviewer enjoyed meeting with you and believes that you are academically capable of performing the firm’s work. The callback is an opportunity for more attorneys to meet with you to ensure that you “fit” into the firm’s culture. Of course, it is also an opportunity for you to learn more about the firm. During your visit you should evaluate the work environment and the people with whom you meet, since if you receive an offer it is likely that you will spend a significant amount of time at the firm.

## General Information

- A callback invitation will come via a phone call made by the interviewer who conducted your on-campus (or screening) interview, or possibly from the firm’s recruiting coordinator. For this reason, it is important that your phone contain a professional voice mail message. Only answer calls when you are available to speak. Attorneys and recruiting staff often work in the evening so a call outside of traditional business hours is not unusual. If you miss a phone call from the firm, return the call as soon as possible.
- Generally, a callback invitation will come anywhere from 24 hours to 2 weeks after your initial interview. The timing of the invitation will depend on how the hiring department is run at each firm.
- A callback visit usually consists of four or five, 20 - 30 minute interviews with both partners and associates from various departments and practice areas. At least one of these attorneys will be a member of the firm’s hiring committee. The visit may also include a meal. Due to the length of time needed for the visit, callbacks are most often scheduled by the half-day, either morning or afternoon.
- Some firms hold designated callback days during which a number of law students from various law schools conduct their individual callback meetings with members of the hiring committee and other interviewers, followed by a group reception or dinner.

## Scheduling the Interview

### **The Invitation and Your Response**

Even if the callback invitation comes from your interviewer, you will be asked to phone the recruiting department to schedule your visit. Return any phone calls or respond to any letters received immediately and try to schedule the callback as soon as you are available. Hiring decisions are made on a rolling basis during the fall; therefore, firms will begin making offers before all callbacks have occurred. If you are fortunate to be invited on several callbacks, you should consider scheduling these office visits in order of your preferences, so that you are visiting your favorite firm first. Be sure to have your calendar with you when scheduling callbacks so that you avoid conflicts with other commitments.

### **Your Conversation with the Hiring Department**

As always, be courteous when speaking to anyone at the firm, as it is likely that everyone with whom you have contact will have input into the hiring decision. When scheduling your callback interview, you should consider asking the following questions:

- *How much time should I allot for the visit? Will it include a meal?*
- *Do you know who I will be meeting with, or may I phone back prior to my interview for this information? (Keep in mind that the interviewers may change at the last minute depending on the attorneys' schedules.)*
- *Is it possible to speak with an attorney in a particular department? (Only ask to speak to attorneys in specific departments if you have a particular interest in that area of law.)*
- *What is your travel reimbursement policy? (This question is only applicable to interviews outside of Boston.)*

**Reimbursement Policies:** Most large firms reimburse for transportation and reasonable expenses for lodging and meals. If you have multiple callbacks in one city, try to arrange them on the same day or trip and inform the employer of this. Firms will usually share costs and don't see it as a "breach of loyalty" if you are also interviewing with others. Firms may or may not make travel arrangements for you. Should you find yourself making your own travel arrangements, call the employer if you have any questions about what constitutes a reasonable expense before you incur the cost and keep all of your itemized receipts to include with your reimbursement request. Some firms may request that you use the NALP Travel Expense Reimbursement Form, available at [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org).

### **Canceling or Declining a Callback**

A firm will not be offended if you decline a callback invitation; however, it is courteous to decline the invitation immediately. Similarly, give the employer as much notice as possible if you must cancel or reschedule a callback. You should only cancel a callback if you encounter an unavoidable conflict, or if you have accepted another offer.

## Before the Interview: Prepare Thoroughly

### **RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH**

Put your excellent research skills to use! Review the firm's website and learn the details about it: the number of attorneys, the locations of offices, the practice areas and representative clients. Remember to

try to request the interviewers' names beforehand and to review their biographies available on the firm's website. In addition to the firm's website, research employer information on Symplicity, Martindale Hubbell ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com)), and the *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* ([www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com)). Other resources include the *Vault Guides*, recent news articles (use Lexis or Westlaw), legal blogs, and students, attorneys and professors who have worked at the firm.

### **RESPONDING TO BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND MORE**

While preparation is similar to that for the initial interview, you should spend a considerable amount of time preparing responses to a wide range of questions for each callback. Expect some informal conversation during the callback, as the firm is trying to gauge your personality and likeability. Anticipate questions that will test your knowledge of legal topics that will allow them to evaluate your legal reasoning and analytical abilities. You should also anticipate detailed and behavioral-type questions during which the interviewers will probe your knowledge of a particular subject and ask about experiences and challenges you have tackled and overcome. Remember that everything on your resume is "fair game" for discussion, so review it carefully (and with a fresh eye) prior to the callback. Spend some time thinking about your skills, interests, quality of life issues and career goals. If you are interviewing in another city, be prepared to discuss why you are interested in relocating. Most importantly, practice answering a wide range of questions out-loud. Thinking about potential answers to questions is not nearly as effective as having a friend ask them of you or sitting in front of a mirror and asking them of yourself. And, if you have not done so already, conduct a mock interview with a CDO Career Counselor before attending a callback.

Identify any areas of your background that you may feel uncomfortable talking about and be prepared to discuss them: your G.P.A., your lack of legal experience, your reasons for changing careers, and any gaps in your schooling or jobs. Practice answering questions about your weaknesses in a positive way. Do not dwell on the subject. Once you have addressed the problem in a concise and candid manner, move on to how you have learned from the experience. Again, a CDO Career Counselor can help you address and prepare to discuss these issues in an artful way.

### **LET YOUR PERSONALITY SHINE THROUGH**

Be confident, without being arrogant, and talk about your strengths and accomplishments. It might help to think of your interview as the "water-cooler" or "conference room" test. You want the interviewer to like you and to think that he/she would enjoy working with you on a daily basis. If your interviewer steers the conversation towards a mutual interest, engage in the conversation. If the interviewer spends most of the time speaking with you about one item on your resume, do not get nervous. Rather, follow the attorney's lead and continue the discussion.

### **PREPARE QUESTIONS**

Prepare several thoughtful, relevant questions to ask at the end of each interview. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the same questions of several attorneys, in fact, this may be a good way to hear different perspectives about working at the firm. Remember, it is expected that you have thoroughly researched the firm, so don't ask questions that are already answered in the firm's written material or website. Good questions are those that require a personal response and solicit varied perspectives from person to person.

Certain topics should be avoided unless the employer brings them up, or until you have received an offer. These include questions about salary, vacations, maternity/paternity leave, or other benefits. Asking about these issues may give the employer the impression that you are more interested in the benefits of the

position than learning about the firm's work and your role as a contributing associate. (Should you seek this information earlier in the recruiting process, you may find it on the firm's website and NALP form.)

### **Sample Questions**

- *Can you tell me more about your firm's system of attorney training and supervision?*
- *How often do associates receive reviews and on what measures are they evaluated?*
- *Could you describe a typical caseload for an attorney in your department?*
- *When can a litigation associate expect to appear in court?*
- *What do you find most challenging and rewarding about your work?*
- *How long have you been working at the firm? Why did you choose to work here?*
- *Could you describe your typical day to me?*
- *Are there new practice areas in development at the firm?*
- *What areas of the firm are growing?*
- *What skills are necessary to succeed here as an associate?*
- *What distinguishes your firm from others?*

## **DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

### **Know Where You Are Going and Other Details**

With high security in place at most office buildings, it is important for you to build in extra time for your arrival at the firm. Remember to take a photo I.D. with you. You may also want to arrive early enough to freshen-up before walking into the firm's offices. It is best to allot enough time to arrive in the firm's offices about 10 minutes early, so that you can locate a restroom (if necessary) and spend a few minutes observing and evaluating the environment.

### **Intangibles to Look for and Evaluate**

*How do people treat one another? Do people behave in a friendly and respectful manner to each other? What do you notice about the interaction between attorneys and support staff? Are people on a first-name basis?*

*Is the office hectic or calm? Are office doors open and inviting? Do you like the office surroundings? Do associates look and seem up-beat and happy - or overworked and tired?*

### **The Interview Itself**

Usually the recruitment coordinator will greet you when you arrive at the firm's offices, and provide you with your interviewing schedule for the day. In some cases, your first interview may be conducted by the recruitment coordinator. Your visit may also include lunch or dinner with members of the firm and a tour of the office. Often, someone from the recruitment staff will meet with you again after your interviews to answer any remaining questions and tell you how the hiring process will proceed. (You might ask at the beginning if you are to return to her/his office.) It is important to keep in mind that everyone you meet may have input in the hiring decisions and to act in a professional manner at all times.

### **Reminders for the Interview**

- *Dress conservatively and professionally*
- *Bring a few extra copies of your resume, transcript, writing sample(s) and a list of references*
- *Turn off your cell phone*
- *Greet everyone you meet with a solid handshake*
- *Use Mr./Ms. unless you are told otherwise*
- *Sit up straight in your chair and maintain eye contact during the interview*

- Remember to smile
- Speak clearly and slowly – people tend to speak more quickly when they are nervous
- Tailor your answers to the employer (practice areas, size, location, etc.)
- Speak positively about previous employers
- Stay interested and enthusiastic throughout the visit – never appear bored
- Remember that although you may be asked the same questions by several different attorneys, each interviewer will hear your response just once
- Be honest, don't exaggerate about your experiences or pretend to know more than you do
- Stay focused on the interviewer, don't take notes during your interview
- Try to have your questions memorized, but if you have to, refer to a list you have brought with you

### **A Few Notes about Meals**

- Remember, the meal is a continuation of your interview and act accordingly
- Follow the lead of the attorneys, order an appetizer only if they do
- Order foods that are easy to eat (forget the spaghetti!) and stay away from strong flavors/spices
- Choose entrees that are mid-priced, it may be a free lunch, but show good judgment
- Remember good manners – don't start to eat until everyone has been served
- When asked if you would like a drink, order only non-alcoholic beverages – even if interviewers do not

## After the Interview

### **Thank You Notes**

Unfortunately, there is no definitive rule as to whether or not you should send a thank you note after your callback interview. Many recruiting coordinators and attorneys who work in large firms have told the Career Development Office that thank you notes are completely unnecessary and are rarely read. Moreover, a typo in a thank you note could prevent you from receiving an offer.

If you would like to send a note of thanks, be sure that it is well written, typed in business format and carefully proofread. Notes should be sent immediately (or no more than a day or two following the callback). You need not send a letter to each person with whom you spoke. One letter to the hiring attorney or to the person who arranged your interviewing day is sufficient. If you do choose to write to more than one person, be sure that the letters aren't identical. Emailed thank you notes are perfectly acceptable as long as you use a business letter format.

### **References, Social Media Checks, and Background Checks**

Always prepare and be ready to provide a list of references (with contact information) during or after the callback. Advise your references that they may receive an inquiry about you so that they are prepared to endorse your candidacy with enthusiasm and in specific detail. Beware that employers will also check your social media activities and profiles for any troubling posts. In addition, a growing number of employers require a student to undergo a criminal and financial background check prior to making a commitment to hire you. Responsible and professional comportment are hallmarks of a successful career and you should remain vigilant in these matters.

### **When Will I Hear My Status?**

After your interview, it is appropriate to ask an employer when you can expect to hear back from them. If you do not hear in the expected time frame, wait another week and then follow-up through e-mail or a phone call. When you will hear from a firm depends on many factors, including the firm's policy, the target size of a firm's summer class, and the volume of students interviewed. Many firms have a hiring committee that will meet weekly to discuss all of their candidates. If you visit the firm on a Thursday, but the

committee meets on Wednesday, you should expect it to be at least a week before you hear from them again. Additionally, some firms may not decide on all the candidates presented at a meeting, but may wait to decide on a student's status until they have met with more students, in which case it might be several weeks before you hear from the firm.

As stated earlier, in light of the challenging economic climate and the expectation that most if not all employers participating in fall recruitment will hire small summer associate classes, **the CDO advises that if you receive an offer, evaluate the opportunity quickly and, if you plan to accept it, do so immediately – even though you will be allowed 28-days in which to make such a decision (see NALP guidelines below).** And, if you are not interested in the offer, decline the offer promptly so that a fellow Suffolk student may be considered for such an opportunity. All law schools are advising their students to proceed in this way and we urge you to be sensitive to and mindful of these market forces. If you have any questions, please speak with a CDO counselor.

**In some cases, you may be put on “hold” after a callback interview.** Because of the small summer programs planned by most firms, employers may hold candidates in whom they still have an interest until they hear whether other offers have been accepted or declined. “Hold” status is not a negative. It means that should an opening arise, you may be in contention for an offer, although an offer is not guaranteed. Again, talk with a career counselor if you have questions.

### Offer Timing Guidelines

NALP (The Association of Legal Career Professionals) promulgates standards for the timing of offers of employment and job acceptances. All employers who recruit law students are required to comply with the “General Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions” as part of NALP’s “Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruiting Activities.” The standards include the following:

## **PART V: GENERAL STANDARDS FOR THE TIMING OF OFFERS AND DECISIONS**

The version of Part V presented below was approved by the NALP Board of Directors on February 25, 2010, and was in effect for the 2010-2011 recruiting season on a provisional basis. On February 24, 2011, NALP’s Board of Directors agreed to extend these guidelines for another provisional year, through the 2011-2012 recruiting season. The Board will again review the guidelines at the end of the 2011 recruiting season. For the full text of the Principles and Standards as well as for Interpretations see [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org).

To promote fair and ethical practices for the interviewing and decision-making process, NALP offers the following standards for the timing of offers and decisions:

### **A. General Provisions**

1. All offers to law student candidates (“candidates”) should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter unless the offers are made pursuant to Sections B and C below, in which case the later response date should apply.
2. Candidates are expected to accept or release offers or request an extension by the applicable deadline. Offers that are not accepted by the offer deadline expire.
3. A candidate should not hold open more than five offers of employment at any one time. For each offer received that places a candidate over the offer limit, the candidate should, within one week of receipt of the excess offer, release an offer.

4. Employers offering part-time or temporary positions for the school term are exempted from the requirements of Paragraphs B and C below.
5. Practices inconsistent with these guidelines should be reported to the candidate's career services office.

## **B. Full-Time Employment Provisions**

1. Employers offering full-time positions to commence following graduation to candidates not previously employed by them should leave those offers open for at least 28 days following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first. Offers made after December 15 for full-time positions to commence following graduation should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter.
2. Candidates may request that an employer extend the deadline to accept the employer's offer until as late as April 1 if the candidate is actively pursuing positions with public interest or government organizations. Candidates may hold open only one offer in such circumstances. Employers are encouraged to grant such requests.
3. Employers offering full-time positions to commence following graduation to candidates previously employed by them should leave those offers open until at least November 1 of the candidate's final year of law school. Candidates should reaffirm these offers within thirty days from the date of the offer letter. Employers may retract any offer that is not reaffirmed within the 30 day period.
4. Employers offering candidates full-time positions to commence following graduation and having a total of 40 attorneys or fewer in all offices are exempted from Paragraphs 1-3 of this Section. Instead, offers made on or before December 15 should remain open for at least three weeks following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first, and offers made after December 15 should remain open for at least two weeks.

## **C. Summer Employment Provisions for Second and Third Year Students**

1. Employers offering positions for the following summer to candidates not previously employed by them should leave those offers open for at least 28 days following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first. Offers made after December 15 for the following summer should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter.
2. Candidates may request that an employer extend the deadline to accept the employer's offer until as late as April 1 if the candidate is actively pursuing positions with public interest or government organizations. Candidates may hold open only one offer in such circumstances. Employers are encouraged to grant such requests.
3. Employers offering positions for the following summer to candidates previously employed by them should leave those offers open until at least November 1. Candidates should reaffirm these offers within thirty days from the date of the offer letter. Employers may retract any offer that is not reaffirmed within the 30 day period.
4. Employers offering candidates positions for the following summer and having a total of 40 attorneys or fewer in all offices are exempted from Paragraphs 1-3 of this Section. Instead, offers made on or before December 15 should remain open for at least three weeks following the date of

the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first, and offers made after December 15 should remain open for at least two weeks.

These standards cover many other situations. For a complete description of these guidelines, visit <http://www.nalp.org/fulltextofnalprinciplesandstandards> .

### Conclusion

Should you have any questions as you participate in your callback interviews, concerning the offer process or the job search generally, please make an appointment with a Career Development Office Career Counselor. We are eager to meet with you and help guide you through your job search.