
Handling Tough Interview Issues

Deciding that an alternative legal career path is for you is only the first step. Eventually, through your research, you will uncover a world of opportunities available to you and will begin the challenging process of interviewing for an alternative legal position. Why challenging? Read on to learn about some of the most common barriers you may face during these interviews and how you can tackle them head on!

OBJECTION ONE:

You can't afford to take this alternative legal position.

There is a common perception in our society that lawyers make or have the potential to make huge sums of money over the course of their careers. When you apply for an alternative position, employers may believe that you want a higher salary than the particular industry can bear. They may also be worried that you may be able to work at their salary for only a relatively short period of time before feeling the financial pinch. Both of these concerns are legitimate. To start, you must honestly assess your financial situation and thoroughly research the industry's salaries before you step into the interview. Once you are confident that money will not be an obstacle, it is up to you to convey that fact to the employer. Mention that you conducted thorough research into salaries prior to embarking on the alternative career search. Let them know that, in preparation for this career change, you have worked hard to pay down on your expenses and credit card bills. Assure them that you are financially prepared to start at a level that is commensurate with your direct and transferable experience and do not necessarily expect to make the same amount of money you did as a lawyer. Remember to negotiate for non-monetary perks such as 401(K) matching, flextime, additional training, etc. Often, these perks will help to compensate for a lower salary and, in the long run, provide you with the flexibility and security you require.

OBJECTION TWO:

You're nice and all, but you have no experience in our industry.

It may very well be the case that your resume, on first glance, does not resemble the typical resume that lands on this employer's desk. You have spent years building a resume to impress legal employers and only belatedly realized that you want to take a different path. Don't despair. You probably possess more experience than you think. Here's where you need to be a detective of sorts. Sure the job title is claims adjuster but what does that really mean? What are the daily tasks? Distill the job down to the basic skills required and you might learn that your legal experience has provided you with tremendous transferable skills. You likely have developed strong research, writing, analytical, and problem-solving skills. Your legal work may also overlap with your current industry of interest. In addition, think about your community, volunteer, committee or fund-raising activities. All of these experiences create a background useful to alternative legal employers.

OBJECTION THREE:

What's this?? You are on your third career! How can you be certain this job is right for you?

The Big C: Commitment. It is what every employer wants. Multiple degrees or multiple job changes may cause some employers to believe that you have not sufficiently narrowed down your interests and career choices. Or alternatively, your multiple career changes and degrees may indicate rash decision-making. Neither scenario is particularly flattering to you. Whether or not the employer's assessment is correct is not the main issue. Rather, in the interview, your job is to counteract the effects of this negative assessment. Here, the key is to be proactive. Don't wait for employers to come up with their own reasons for the changes. Create a story that will make sense to an employer as an explanation. Perhaps several interim career moves or degrees were necessary to put in you a position to be viable candidate in your current industry of choice. In that case, your decisions will appear purposeful and thoughtful. Or, if there is no logical connection between your previously obtained degrees and jobs and your current path, fess up. However, you should then immediately stress what steps you have taken to make sure you are better informed about this new field and better prepared to make a lasting commitment to it. Lastly, if your previous career/degree changes were necessary because you were in a certain phase in your life, say so. For example, perhaps you had a child or you needed to nurse a sick relative back to health or the bottom fell out in your previous organization. Life circumstances such as these may have led you to make career choices you ordinarily would not have made. Once you admit this to the employer, immediately stress that you are now in a different stage and are excited and confident about your new career path.

OBJECTION FOUR:

If you didn't have what it takes to make it as a lawyer, why should we hire you?

OUCH! This employer concern is arguably the most personal and perhaps the hardest to answer. You may be struggling with residual baggage from your life as a lawyer. It is not uncommon to experience pangs of inadequacy, frustration, and/or regret when leaving the practice of law. In the alternative, you may very well have been a huge success as a lawyer and now are seeking to go down a different path or undertake a new challenge. In any case, make sure that you take the time before embarking on a new career to carefully consider where you've been and where you are going. If there are negative feelings stemming from your past career choices, try to resolve them prior to the interview by focusing on all the high points: the excellent training you were provided, the contacts you've made, the opportunities to help you've had and even the terrible working conditions you survived! If you are deciding to embark upon a new challenge, then show your enthusiasm and be clear in your mind how your experience as a lawyer compliments your new career path. You will exude a positive outlook and this will go a long way in answering the skeptical employer.