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# ASK LINDA

*Dear Linda: How can I demonstrate my capabilities when I am being interviewed for a job?*

Employers hire people based on objective and subjective criteria. The objective data usually includes a minimum requirement for education and number of years experience. Some firms and corporations have hard fast rules about degrees and paralegal schooling. Others weigh experience and education and emphasize one or the other depending on the job requirements and the principles they have established in their organization.

The subjective data is twofold. First, it is an interpretation of your accumulated experience. Employers have to ascertain whether or not your experience qualifies you to do the job. Second, and sometimes most importantly, they want to know if your personality and demeanor fit into their corporate culture. Like any other relationship in life, the chemistry has to be right.

As you might suspect, the subjective evaluation is a much harder assessment to make. What I like about it, however, is that it gives you the opportunity to distinguish yourself. And I think this is the crux of your question. How do you communicate what you have done in a way that will be profitable to the employer? In essence, what does the presentation look like?

An interview is simply an exchange of data where you and the employer inform each other of specific goals. Your role is to determine what the employer's problems are. This is the discovery stage of the interview. Once this information has been uncovered you can tell the employer about your work experiences in a way that will cause them to understand how you can solve their problems.

The best way to communicate your experience is to *Interview by Example*. Use your tools to demonstrate past work experiences and how it can solve the employer's current problems. This is where you bring to life what your resume says you are. I like to think of this as show and tell.

*Interviewing by Example* is not an easy task, primarily because of the large accumulation of experience you have had. Detailed preparation is the key. It helps to start with a skills inventory for each and every job you have had. You should list each and every task you have ever performed. Quantify the tasks and include the names of the attorneys you did the work for. Some of the attorneys you list should also function as references. The task list should be added to your portfolio, or at best, be given to the interviewer as a separate document attached to your resume.

Writing samples and attorney acknowledgement memos can also be attached to the list. Writing samples should demonstrate your ability to analyze and editorialize. Use short samples and make sure to redact the client names. Do not use form or boilerplate documents.

An attorney acknowledgement memo is simply a memorialization written by your supervising attorney at the close of a project. It should state the project type, what you did on the project, and include his or her comments about your performance. You can assist this process by keeping an inventory of the work you do as you are working on the assignment.



Employers want to be confident that the people they hire can do the job. Your ability to communicate how you can make their practice profitable in the least amount of time will distinguish you. Convincing the employer that you are capable of handling the work is as easy as demonstrating what you have done in the past and backing it up with specific examples and references. Using my show and tell ideas will assist you in completing this task in a professional and credible manner.

Watch for a discussion about personality detection and fitting into the corporate culture in the spring edition of Ask Linda.

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*Linda speaks regularly about succeeding in the legal assistant profession. She has been published by Legal Assistant Today, The National Law Journal, Legal Management, and many other legal journals.*

*Linda is in charge of programs for the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association Legal Assistants Section. She initiated and edited the Michigan Legal Assistant for the State Bar of Michigan for 10 years. She has participated on the advisory boards of several legal assistants programs in Michigan.*

*Linda invites you to attend her talk on resume writing at the LAAM Mid-Year Seminar and Job Fair on April 5, 2003. For further information see [www.laamnet.org](http://www.laamnet.org) or contact Linda at [lindjev@aol.com](mailto:lindjev@aol.com), or 248-471-3443.*

