

Tips from a Notre Dame Law Alum for the paralegal interview:

Some law firms have a more complex and intense interview process than I would have ever imagined for a paralegal position with a large law firm. At Wiley Rein in DC, an interview for an entry-level paralegal consists of a 45-minute written assessment (for spelling, grammar, etc.), a meeting with two HR representatives, a meeting with the Senior Manager Litigation Attorney, and a round-robin series of meetings with four attorneys. Wiley Rein says the process takes about 4 hours. By comparison, my interview for my current job as an associate required me to meet with the head of the recruiting committee, two other partners, and two associates. I believe I was out of there in an hour.

Recently, I had an informal discussion with a few of the lawyers (partners and associates) here at my office about interviewing and recruiting. We remember that our interviews involved no discussions of the law or lawyering. We all agreed that the primary goal of our interviews, whether we were being interviewed or interviewing an applicant, was to determine if the applicant is someone we would trust with our work and is someone we would enjoy working with.

My sense is that if I was hiring a paralegal, I would only want them to have some familiarity with terms like "complaint," "answers to discovery," "interrogatories," "production requests," etc. However, I wouldn't want or expect a paralegal to come in believing they were an expert in all things legal. Lawyers have to sign-off on the documents under their license, so we are essentially looking for paralegals who can learn how we want certain things done and follow those instructions. I guess a good paralegal is a person who can take a project, understand its purpose, and follow the attorney's directions with an understanding of that purpose so that the lawyer is confident that the paralegal will be able to recognize any potential problems and know that those potential problems need to be brought to the attorney's attention. A paralegal is inherently in a supporting role (you will never see paralegal open their own law firm without any lawyer), so most law firms are looking for paralegals who are team players that can work well the attorneys.

I hope this helps. The bottom line is that I think most interviews for paralegals are designed to find someone who (1) is easy to work with, (2) is "coachable" or follows directions easily, and (3) is intelligent enough to see the forest from the trees when working on a project such that (4) a lawyer would trust to delegate assignments.