

*New York  
Interviewing Strategies*

*by the Greater New York Chapter  
of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Greater New York Chapter of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society is an active organization of lawyers who are interested in recruiting and retaining “the best and the brightest” law students to work and live in the New York City area. The purpose of this booklet is to provide suggestions to help you throughout the interviewing process.

If you come to New York, you will find that the Chapter provides valuable networking and other opportunities to its members. We host “speaker’s lunches” four times a year (past speakers have included William F. Atkin, Associate General Counsel—International, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; the Honorable Jay Bybee, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit; LaVell Edwards, former BYU football Head Coach; Timothy Flanigan, former Deputy White House Counsel; Thomas Griffith, General Counsel of BYU and former Chief Legal Officer to the U.S. Senate during the impeachment trial of President William Jefferson Clinton; David Neeleman, CEO of JetBlue; and David Checketts, former President of Madison Square Garden). Additionally, we host a number of events each summer for the benefit of summer associates and law students who are employed or seeking employment in the New York City area. Please locate our webpage on the J. Reuben Clark Society website for pictures and more information ([www.jrcls.org](http://www.jrcls.org)).

## MYTHS VS. FACTS

The following are some “myths” and “facts” about living and working in the New York City area:

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*Myth: New York City is not a great place to raise a family.*

Fact: New York City is safer than most major cities and the Latter Day Saint community is thriving here—as demonstrated by the recent dedication of the Manhattan Temple. You will likely find that New York City and its beautiful suburbs are among the best places in the world to raise a family.

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*Myth: I can't afford to live in or around New York City.*

Fact: You *can* afford to live in or around New York City. Although it is expensive, so are other major cities. Fortunately, you will likely earn a larger salary to compensate. And remember, many of your expenses are going to be the same no matter where you live (i.e. student loans, car payment, auto insurance).

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*Myth: I want to live in New York City, but I can't live without my car.*

Fact: If you live in New York City (as opposed to the suburbs), you will find a car *inconvenient* compared to the many convenient and affordable public transportation options (i.e. subway, taxi, bus). You will also enjoy not having a car payment or auto insurance.

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*Myth: I want to work in the City and live in the suburbs, but I don't want to spend extra time commuting.*

Fact: Commuting to and from New York City from its suburbs is perhaps easier and faster than commuting to any other major city, thanks to the convenient train and subway systems. It is possible to spend less time commuting to your office from the suburbs than you would from certain places within the City.

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*Myth: Commuting from the suburbs may be convenient from certain areas, but I won't be able to afford to live in those areas.*

Fact: There are many convenient and affordable housing options in the suburbs for young lawyers and their families. In fact, a large number of young associates and other young professionals and their families live in the suburbs near the City.

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*Myth: New York lawyers work longer hours than lawyers in other cities.*

Fact: This generalization is unfair and inaccurate. If you plan to work at a law firm, especially at a firm in a major city, you will work hard. New York lawyers do not on average work longer hours than lawyers in other major cities; but, we think their working hours are more fulfilling professionally because of the quality of the projects brought to New York lawyers. We believe that young lawyers become better lawyers, faster, by practicing in New York.

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*Myth: I can always experience New York City later in my career.*

Fact: After working in New York City, you can generally find a job anywhere in the world. However, moving to New York City after working elsewhere is usually more difficult.

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## PREPARATION

Securing a position in New York City can be a difficult process—especially when you are applying from somewhere outside of New York. To help you prepare to be successful throughout this process, we have compiled the following suggestions from experienced interviewers around the City:

### Early Preparation

- First and foremost, focus on your studies—being near the top of your class is generally a prerequisite for getting an interview at a major New York firm.
- Be (or quickly become) an interesting person who does interesting things. Use the summer after your first year of law school to do something that you will want to talk about with your interviewers. If you can work or volunteer in New York City in a law or business environment, especially if you have no “legitimate” family connection to New York, you should definitely do so. Or do something law-related in a foreign country. Do whatever you can to “build your resume” in an interesting way.
- Create a flawless “paper record”—send a draft of your cover letter and resume to an experienced attorney, preferably one in New York, for feedback. (Refer to our “resume tips” on the JRCLS website.)
- Know why you want to work and live in New York and be prepared to discuss this thoroughly. It is especially helpful if you have lived here before, or if you currently have family or friends living in the area.
- Know the firm(s) where you will be interviewing. You are expected to be familiar with their reputations and programs and know why you want to work there. You can be sure your competitors at Columbia, NYU, Harvard and Yale will. Review the firms’ websites and other public sources (i.e. vault.com or nylawyer.com) so you will be prepared to ask informed questions. Many of the lawyers who will interview you believe that they work at the best firms in the world. If you don’t seem to share that enthusiasm with them, they will think you’re not really seriously interested.
- Do “information interviews” if you have the opportunity to speak with attorneys who practice in the areas that interest you *before* your job interviews. This is also an opportunity to pick up on “lingo” specific to an area of practice (e.g., corporate lawyers work on “deals,” not “cases”) or specific to a firm.

- Do “practice interviews” with experienced interviewers on the other side if possible (but role playing with other law students is helpful too) and ask for critical feedback. Prepare yourself to discuss your resume, your interest in New York and your interest in the firm. If you don’t think you can enthusiastically wax eloquent about something on your resume, you need to prepare more or revise your resume.

#### Last-Minute Preparation

- Buy a new suit and shoes that make you “look like a lawyer”—your missionary rags should be honorably discharged.
- Read *The New York Times* and/or *The Wall Street Journal*—know what is happening in and around New York and you will be better equipped to engage in quality conversations.
- We love JetBlue. But if you take a JetBlue redeye to New York City, plan an extra day to recover before you start interviewing or do something to appear energetic. You don’t want to appear boring and untalkative merely because you’re exhausted.
- Relax and be confident—you look the part, you know what’s on your resume and are prepared to discuss it, you know why you want to work and live here and you’re ready to demonstrate your fantastic personality!

In summary, prepare yourself to have short conversations (usually 10 to 30 minutes) in which you will demonstrate your intelligence, your motivation and your interpersonal skills—while at the same time you explain clearly your reasons for wanting to work at a particular firm and live in or around New York City.

## INTERVIEWING

According to our sources, your interviewers will be looking for students who are intelligent, motivated and personable. Along with “intelligence” comes practicality and common sense (don’t say anything you’ll regret later), the ability to explain complex issues in a clear and concise manner (know your resume and beyond) and intellectual curiosity (ask good questions and follow-up questions). The fact that you’re “motivated” should be clear from your resume, but make sure you are able to talk about your accomplishments and goals in a confident, unapologetic way, without crossing the line into arrogance (but realizing that what passes for arrogance in the West is normal New York chutzpah and what seems like self-effacing humility in the West may appear to be indecision or reticence to a typical New Yorker). The fact that you are “personable” is not enough—you only have a few minutes to generate a relationship of trust and confidence, demonstrate that you are a team player with a positive attitude and, if possible, reveal your sense of humor (though don’t take this as a suggestion to try out your latest stand-up “material”).

The following are some more specific tips that are designed to help you maximize your chances of getting an offer:

- Dress conservatively, look sharp, arrive early and bring a few extra copies of your resume (which you will probably not need—but just in case).
- Be friendly and confident! If the firm has granted you an interview, they are already impressed with your credentials. Now they’re just making sure you’re as impressive in person as you appear on paper. Being overly quiet or nervous will not work in your favor. Likewise, neither will being arrogant or obnoxious—just be yourself (assuming you are friendly and confident as opposed to arrogant and obnoxious!).
- Be sincere—you will find that many interviewers ask similar questions (i.e. why New York, why this firm, why law). Know what you are going to say, but make sure your responses are honest and thoughtful as opposed to sounding rehearsed or simply being “what they want to hear.” Be prepared to answer follow-up questions and discuss specifics.
- Be mature and professional at all times—even if you “hit it off” with a particular interviewer (say, for example, that you and your interviewer both attended BYU, you’re both married with children and you both drink diet cola, but only on special occasions). Remember, regardless of any “connections” you make, your interviewers need to be confident that recommending you won’t jeopardize their own professional reputations.

- Ask thoughtful, appropriate questions at appropriate times, listen carefully to the answers and then ask even more thoughtful follow-up questions—you can and should prepare some of your questions in advance, but more importantly, listen carefully to your interviewers and ask questions about things they've discussed with you. Make sure you don't sound "scripted."
- If you are invited to lunch or dinner, relax but remember you are still being interviewed. Brush up on your table manners and take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the firm. Show them that you are the kind of person they would like to have as a colleague.

## **FOLLOW-UP / CONCLUSION**

After your interviews, the firm will give you an estimate as to when they expect to make a decision (if they don't, it is acceptable to ask). Also, they will probably give you a list containing the names and contact information of those with whom you interviewed.

If you decide to send a "thank you" letter immediately following your interviews, make sure it is error-free and realize that there is no need to send it to more than one person. The recipient will simply forward it to your file anyway. Keep it short and to the point—express your gratitude and your continued interest in the firm.

If you receive an offer and are undecided, feel free to contact any of the people on your contact list to ask more probing questions about the firm—especially when deciding among firms. And, if you want to discuss "the way it really is," please contact a member of the New York Chapter of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society!