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How to Use IRAC Strategies for a Successful Job Interview

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Special to the Legal

I don't remember much about the first case I read in law school, but I do remember how intimidating it was. I arrogantly thought I would quickly read those how-ever-many pages, absorb the content on the first read, IRAC the case in five minutes, and enjoy the rest of my life. Instead I remember spending an eternity reading each page and infinite more time re-reading the most boring content I'd ever been exposed to. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, I ventured into the hellish comprehension task of briefing. Then I realized that there was no "rest of my life" to enjoy for at least three years.

Like that first case, job interviews can be intimidating, time consuming, anxiety-ridden and frustrating. But they don't have to be and the IRAC strategy that served us so well in our legal analysis can help.

Let's refresh our memories on IRAC. I is for issue, the question to be resolved. R is for rule, the law to be applied. A is for analysis, how the law applies to the facts. C is for conclusion, which answers the question (sometimes).

Below are some strategies young attorneys and new law school grads can



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use for successful interviews, using the IRAC paradigm.

ISSUE

The issue is you need a job. You've invested years of your life to become a lawyer. Now, you'd like to nobly apply that knowledge and make a difference in the world, ambitiously shed your soul-sinking student loan debt, or practically provide yourself life's basic necessities.

RULE

The rule is the employer's job description. Most job descriptions can be broken down into three main elements: the sales pitch (why work for them); the work description (what will be done for them); and, the requirements (what skills and training they need).

For the most part, the rules are about the employer's needs, not yours.

ANALYSIS

Imagine you're going shopping for some new dress pants that cost no more than \$30. You walk in and out of multiple stores, browsing through and trying on a broad variety of pants. After hours, you narrow your search to two pairs—black and blue—that fit you perfectly. You look at the tags and learn that the blue pants costs \$50 but the black pair is within your budget. It's a no-brainer. You choose the black pants. Issue: finding new pants. Rule: the price the store charged you in exchange for the pants. Analysis: detailed and time consuming (visited stores, browsed pants, and considered size, fit, color, and cost). Conclusion: bought black pants.

"What's the point?" Finding a job should be no less strategic than finding new pants. As a banker and lawyer, I interviewed many people who spent less time preparing for their interviews than they spent on finding their outfits for the interview. Sadly, many left without realizing why they didn't make a favorable impression or land the job. So let's discuss how to avoid that outcome.

Unlike the rules, which are based on the prospective employer's desires, the analysis should be about you. And, as

Shakespeare states, “above all: to thine own self be true.” By starting with yourself, you will acquire a stronger appreciation of your facts (the issue), a better perspective on the prospective employer’s job description (the rule), a sturdier analysis of how your facts and their rules interplay, and a firmer conclusion about your job prospect.

Because I didn’t receive the offer for my first law gig until a few days before taking the bar exam, and I have had seasons when I needed a job and couldn’t find one, I know the pressure—even desperation—that comes with needing a job and not having one. In those moments it is easy to become convinced that you need any job. The truth is, you don’t need or want any job. Hence, resist the temptation to apply for jobs you’re not qualified for or jobs you’d hate.

How do you know which jobs to apply for? I, conservatively, follow the 80-20 rule. If I meet approximately 80 percent of the job description’s requirements, I apply. I can learn the other 20 percent on the job. After all, with all my years of schooling, I have more experience learning than doing most other things in my life.

However, there is a risk to this rule, as a prospective employer could be desperately searching for the 20 percent I lack and be open to training the right person on some of the 80 percent I possess. Allow me to explain. In another life I was a bank manager. Before I hired someone, I took an honest look at the team I managed and determined the area(s) where our needs were greatest. I did not only look for people to complete our complement, but also for people who complemented our team. That meant that if our team needed someone strong in sales and I met an applicant who met every other requirement but lacked the sales traits we needed, I would have to make the difficult decision to pass on that candidate. My decision would not be because the

candidate wasn’t great, but because the candidate was not a great fit for my team at that time.

Despite the risk, we have to start somewhere. So make your rule (maybe make it less conservative than my 80-20) and follow it through, tweaking it on a case by case basis. But silence that desperation, as you prepare for your interview, and think through things thoroughly. What do you do well? What do you enjoy doing? What do you hate? Initially, look for jobs that will have you do what you do well. They allow you to come to an employer with skills they can readily use and also give you the confidence you need to learn what you do not yet know.

Look for jobs that will allow you to do what you enjoy. Understand that often doing what you enjoy requires you to do what you don’t enjoy.

Next, look for jobs that will allow you to do what you enjoy. Understand that often doing what you enjoy requires you to do what you don’t enjoy. Such is life. As much as possible, avoid doing what you hate for a prolonged period.

Your analysis of a job or prospective employer should be crisp, confidently stating both similarities and distinctions between what they seek and what you can offer them. To do this, you must think through several questions. What do you have that your prospective employer wants? What do you not have that your prospective employer wants? How do you intend to obtain what you lack?

Don’t limit your analysis to the prospective employer’s needs. Have an eloquent response for what makes you similar and different from other prospective candidate. When you compare yourself with others, compare yourself to the smartest person you know or the person you would hire for the job.

Why? Put simply, your job at an interview is to convince the prospective employer why it should hire you and not another candidate. It behooves you to assume that the other candidates are all geniuses, and nothing less. Don’t be arrogant in thinking you’re the best candidate—on paper or in practice—because only the employer knows the caliber of candidates it is interviewing, the strength and weaknesses of its existing team, and its unique business needs. Therefore, only the employer can determine who the best candidate is; and, sometimes, even the employer errs in that determination.

After you have reflected on you, on the needs of the employers, and conducted an analysis of how your facts apply to the prospective employer’s rules, you should know whether a job or prospective employer fits you well. If you’re not convinced of that, after completing your analysis, it will be difficult to successfully advocate for yourself before that prospective employer at an interview and even more difficult to be true to yourself in that role or at that organization.

As the store wants you to buy the pants, so also the prospective employer wants you to buy into the opportunity offered. As the store’s financial value exceeded your budget, so also the employer’s financial value may exceed your current financial net worth. But remember, as the store wanted your \$30 in exchange for those pants, the right employer wants your skills and training in exchange for a promising future. Find a fit.

CONCLUSION

The right job for you is out there. Review the rules of multiple prospective employers. Analyze them in light of who you are—your facts. And don’t buy what doesn’t fit. Go get them! •