



| Associate  
Lawyers guide  
to interviewing  
in-house



## Introduction

Congratulations on your upcoming in-house legal counsel interview! Now, let's get you prepared so the nerves don't get you on the day.

To successfully land that much desired in-house legal position, you must know how the in-house interview process differs from that of a law firm. While law firm interviewers will seek a deep understanding of the subject matter and applicable legislation, corporate counsel interviewers will seek a more holistic perspective between the law, legal risk and the commerciality of the business.

During the interview, you will need to answer questions on your legal experience and skills. You'll also need to demonstrate that you have the business acumen to provide sound legal and commercial advice to your employer.

As a leading specialist legal search and recruitment consultancy we are experts at interviewing legal industry candidates on our client's behalf. Our job is to deliver a diverse slate of exceptional candidates with the qualifications necessary to meet our client's requirements and, as best as possible, the personality that will fit within the organisation's culture.

With vast experience and global reach, we help in-house legal counsel to develop and progress their careers, both here in Australia and across the globe.

To help you prepare for your next interview, we have compiled some of the most frequently asked questions at in-house counsel job interviews, as well as some tips and tricks to help you master the interview and put your best foot forward.

Naturally, if you have any further questions, please contact one of our Taylor Root consultants.



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## Questions you may be asked during your In-house Legal Counsel interview

Preparing your responses to common interview questions can help you offer strategic and knowledgeable replies.



### General questions

These questions help a hiring partner get to know you a little more by understanding your passions, interests and how you may fit into the firm's culture.

- Why do you want to move in-house?
- Give us your 3-minute background story and why you are here.
- What most interests you regarding this position?
- Why are you interested in working for our company?
- What appeals to you about being a legal counsel for this specific industry?
- Where would you like to be career-wise five years from now?
- What is one of your career highlights/successes?
- Describe the job (for which you are interviewing) to me based on your understanding of the role.
- How do you stay up-to-date with changes in the law, as well as legal and industry trends?



### Competency interview questions

Competency based interview questions aim to test an individual on specific skills which would be required to perform well in the role. They are designed to assess a candidate against a standard set of competencies required for a role. Asking these questions enables employers to understand a candidate's past behaviours and experiences and are used as a basis to predict future behaviour and suitability for a job.

- Tell me about your current position and how your responsibilities have evolved since joining the company/firm.
- What skills have you honed that will support you in this role?
- What experience do you feel has best prepared you for this position?
- How would you quickly increase your knowledge about our industry and organisation if hired?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a lawyer?
- How have you contributed to the improvement of a team's overall performance in the past?
- How do you deal with conflicting priorities and deadlines?



### Behavioural interview questions

The purpose of behavioural interviewing is to objectively measure a potential employee's past behaviours as a predictor of future results. In behavioural interviews, candidates are asked to give specific examples of when they have demonstrated particular behaviours or skills.

- Can you share an example of a recent time when you tried something unfamiliar, and how you improved your skills?
- Can you share an example of an interpersonal conflict you had in the workplace, and how you resolved it?
- Give us an example of a situation where you had to persuade another party to see your way of thinking.
- Tell me about a time when a business partner was adamant about not taking your legal advice. What was the situation, and how did you resolve it?
- Is there a time when you foresaw potential issues with a piece of work or a project and how did you mitigate or prevent these issues?
- Tell us about a situation where you demonstrated real initiative.
- What has been the most difficult challenge you have faced, and how did you solve it?





### Technical interview questions

Technical questions will form a major part of most in-house recruitment processes and will usually involve a discussion centred on the matters listed on your CV or a drafting exercise to test the extent of your drafting skills.

Technical questions are often embedded in the main interview but in some recruitment processes a separate interview is held. These normally come in two forms:

1. A case study or situation is given to you prior to the interview (often 30mins prior) which you will discuss with the general counsel  
or
2. A legal document (often a confidential agreement or terms sheet) is given to you to mark-up with recommendations which, will later be reviewed by the general counsel.

Whether technical questions form part of the main interview or a separate round, the interviewer is seeking a deep understanding of the subject matter and applicable legislation beyond mere facts and issues. Interviewers are interested in your ability to grasp the broader context of why the law has been applied in a particular manner and how it aligns with your client's objectives, commercial considerations, and legal strategy.

These discussions will involve probing questions about relevant provisions of legislation, the rationale behind the drafting of specific documents, the reasoning behind the structure of a transaction, or the justification for a particular course of action. In many cases, the interviewer will ask you to apply the situation to the business or industry sector for which you are interviewing to see if you grasp some of the issues the business faces or potentially could face.

To prepare effectively, it is recommended to thoroughly review your CV and refresh your understanding of the matters you have worked on. For each transaction, deal, project or case listed on your CV, you should be able to discuss:

- The legal issues – refresh yourself on the relevant legislation
- The parties involved
- Your role in the deal
- The reasoning behind the structure of a transaction
- The justification for a particular course of action
- The value or ruling (if significant)

With regard to the drafting assessment, it typically involves a case scenario and documents, and you are given limited time to prepare your response. The assessments can take place at home or in the interviewer's office where the hiring manager can evaluate your ability to work under pressure and manage time effectively.

The exam tests a variety of drafting abilities that a general counsel will expect a law firm associate to have obtained in private practice:

- Understanding of grammar and usage
- The parties involved
- Tightening wordy sentencing
- Eliminating legalese
- Writing a cogent argument

While most companies often state that candidates don't need to prepare prior to a written assessment, it is important not to underestimate the significance of this test.





## Business interviews

Interviewing with non-legal key stakeholders from the business is often a daunting prospectus for any law firm associate moving in-house. If you have made it to the business round, you have proven to the general counsel that you have the necessary drafting and legal knowledge for the role. Now it is the businesses turn to test your fit for the company.

The business does not wish to hire a lawyer who they see as a roadblock, who focuses on dotting the i's and crossing the t's. They are seeking a lawyer who can bring potential solutions to the table, who can identify the associated legal and business risks, and make a convincing recommendation for the best move forward.

Business interviews will often focus on your transaction list and ask probing questions around the client's objectives in the transaction, the commercial considerations, and the legal strategy. The interviewers will often flip the situation and ask the lawyer whether the justification for a particular course of action would be the same at this organisation. There is no right answer in these situations and the interviewer is more interested in your chain of thought in getting to the answer rather than the answer itself.

It is difficult to prepare for a business round interview but here are a few things to consider:

- Know your CV: thoroughly review your CV and refresh your understanding of the commercial and business decisions behind the legal transactions matters you have worked on
- Research the company: familiarize yourself with the business's background, industry, products or services, key clients, competitors, and recent news or developments. This will

demonstrate your interest and commitment to the organisation

- Understand the legal needs: gain insight into the specific legal needs of the business. Research any industry-specific regulations, compliance requirements, or legal challenges that the company may face. This will help you showcase your expertise and ability to provide valuable legal counsel

- Commercial awareness: develop an understanding of the business's commercial objectives, strategies, and market trends. Consider how legal issues intersect with the company's goals and how you can contribute to its success. Showcasing your commercial awareness will help you stand out as a strategic legal advisor

- Soft skills and collaboration: while technical legal skills are crucial, businesses also value lawyers who possess strong communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills. Highlight instances where you have worked effectively as part of a team, managed relationships with stakeholders, or provided practical solutions to complex legal challenges

- Ethical considerations: understand the importance of ethics and compliance in the business world. Be prepared to discuss your approach to ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and maintaining confidentiality

- Ask thoughtful questions: prepare a list of insightful questions to ask during the interview. This demonstrates your genuine interest in the role and allows you to gather more information about the business's legal department, company culture, and future initiatives.

## The Star Method

A technique you can use to prepare for behavioural and situational interview questions

The STAR method is a behavioural interview style where the interviewer is looking for you to discuss a specific **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult. The STAR method helps you create an easy-to-follow story with a clear conflict and resolution. The STAR method is a valuable technique you can even apply to your answers for behavioural and competency interview questions.

On the right is what each part of the technique means and the approximate percentage of time you should dedicate to speaking about each section.

No matter what stories you decide to share, make sure you define a situation, task, action and result, and showcase skills and abilities most relevant to the job.



### S

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#### Set the **Situation** (20%)

Explain the situation so that your interviewer understands the context of your example, they do not need to know every detail!

### T

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#### Explain your **Tasks**/involvement (10%)

Talk about the task that you took responsibility for completing or the goal of your efforts.

### A

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#### Present your **Actions** (60%)

Describe the actions that you personally took to complete the task or reach the end goal. Highlight skills or character traits addressed in the question.

### R

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#### Show off your **Results** (10%)

Explain the positive outcomes or results generated by your actions or efforts. Here, it is important to highlight quantifiable results. You may also want to emphasize what you learned from the experience or your key takeaways.

## Questions you should ask during the interview

Asking the right kinds of questions in an interview can show that you're genuinely interested in the role.

In seeking a job, it's important to remember that an interview isn't just an opportunity for the employer to find out if you are a suitable candidate - the interview works both ways. If you bring good interview questions to the table, you'll find out quickly if the job is the right match for you. You'll also demonstrate to the hiring manager that you are interested in the role. This is also your opportunity to find out if they have any reservations about your candidacy for the role.

Good topics to ask about are:



### The organisation

Strategic goals, challenges they are facing, why do the interviewer(s) enjoy working there, most significant recent developments in the firm/organisation, etc.



### The working conditions

Opportunities, career development, how is performance evaluated, etc.



### The process

What happens next, how many people are being interviewed, do they fill open positions from within the firm/organisation first, etc.

Avoid asking questions that have been answered for you during the interview. Do not ask anything you should already know from details they have sent you.

These are examples of some questions you definitely want to cover off in any interview process.



What will be the reporting structure for this role?



How is the legal department structured within the company?



How does the business prefer to work with legal?



Are there opportunities for growth and development here?



What are some of the biggest challenges the company faces?



What made you join this company?

If appropriate, try to weave your questions in as the interview is progressing. It demonstrates to the interviewer that you're proactive and engaged in the process.



## About Taylor Root

We are a global legal search and recruitment consultancy and have been a market leader for more than 30 years.

We help global law firms and businesses to build and expand their legal, risk, compliance and corporate governance functions. Whether you're hiring your first In-house Counsel, expanding your associate team in a certain practice area or expanding your risk department internationally, we partner with businesses at every step of your journey.

Our services include contingent and retained search, permanent, temporary and interim recruitment as well as consultancy solutions.

Wherever we operate we have made an impact, from Düsseldorf to Dubai, New York to Shanghai or Milan to Melbourne. From pioneering specialist recruitment in particular locations, to shaping how our clients have approached hiring, our influence is evident everywhere.

Today, we have 16 international offices-a truly global network of search and recruitment experts. Put simply, no one can match our global reach, or our history.

## Get in touch

Contact one of our expert consultants – they have an extensive understanding of the market that they cover.



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