



General
Counsel
The essential
interview guide

Introduction

Congratulations on your upcoming interview for a general counsel position! Now, let's get you prepared so the nerves don't get you on the day.

This is an exciting though highly competitive process that requires you to demonstrate more than just legal know-how alone.

To stand out amongst the other qualified candidates, you will need to demonstrate not only your understanding of the law but also your business acumen, communication, and interpersonal skills, as well as leadership capabilities.

As a leading specialist legal search and recruitment consultancy, Taylor Root are experts at interviewing lawyers at all levels. Our job is to deliver a diverse slate of exceptional candidates with the qualifications necessary to meet our client's needs and, as best as possible, the personality that will fit well within the organisation's culture.

With vast experience and global reach, we help General Counsels to develop and progress their careers, both in Australia and across the globe.

To help you prepare for your next interview, we have compiled some of the most frequently asked questions covered in General 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 General Counsel interview

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



Knowledge of your business/sector

Companies need a lawyer who understands the industry they operate in and the legal issues that come with it. This question helps the interviewer understand your knowledge and how it could be applied to their business. It also helps them understand how you view legal issues and how you can use your experience to enable their business objectives.

- What do you consider to be the biggest legal challenges our business may face?
- Can you describe a legal compliance issue an organisation in our industry could face?
- What do you know about our company and why are you interested in working for us?
- How do you stay current with changes in the legal landscape and industry regulations that may affect our organisation?
- Can you explain what strategic thinking in a General Counsel position looks like to you?



Experience

Companies hire General Counsels to help them navigate legal issues, so it's important that potential hires have a demonstrated knowledge of complex legal issues and the ability to effectively manage them. By asking these types of questions, employers can get a better understanding of the candidate's legal acumen and ability to handle difficult and complex legal matters.

- What is the most challenging legal situation you have faced? What happened and how did you manage it?
- Describe a typical situation where the business asked you to sign-off on something, which presented significant risk to the organisation and how you dealt with it
- How have you created a competitive advantage for your company?
- What percentage share of work do you keep in-house versus instruct external counsel on?
- How have you helped to control costs or reduce external legal spend? What is the nature of the work you brief out?



Working with ExCo and non-legal personnel

For most General Counsels today, their role has expanded outside of legal. A sure sign that a GC has earned the trust and respect of the executive team is an answer that includes high-level or expanded responsibilities and reporting structure. General Counsels are often tasked with the important job of communicating legal concepts in a way that is both understandable and actionable.

These questions are designed to assess your ability to think on your feet and provide clear, concise explanations to people who may not have any legal background. The interviewer is looking to see that you can adjust your language and style to the intended audience.

- Describe your relationship with the executive team and the Board in your current role
- How has your role evolved in the time you have been with the business and what unique talents do you bring to the group?
- Tell me about a time you gave strategic advice regarding taking legal action
- What strategies do you use to communicate complex legal concepts to non-legal personnel?
- Have you ever delivered news of an unfortunate outcome to a senior executive? Talk me through your delivery



Team management/leadership

General Counsels will usually supervise a team of lawyers. It's important to demonstrate a certain leadership style that helps set a tone for the department and organisation. These questions are designed to see how you would handle a team, your management and leadership style.

- How do you ensure you're leading a cohesive team?
- How are you developing your current talent to meet challenges both today and in the future?
- Tell me about a time when you and your team significantly raised the bar and exceeded expectations
- Tell me about a time when business priorities changed. Describe how you helped your team understand and carry out the shifted goals
- Looking at the needs of our company, what additional resources (i.e.; legal team, risk, company secretary, privacy) do you envisage we may require down the track?
- What involvement have you had in ESG or with implementing an ESG strategy at Board level?
- What exposure have you had to implementing DEI initiatives in your current organisation?
- Talk me through your management style



Value-based questions

In business, core values reflect a company’s mission and long-term objectives. They’re not just theoretical beliefs. Values-based interview questions are designed to understand a candidate’s strengths, as well as their values

and work ethic. Organisation leaders often share a set of core values that help them make decisions, and value-based questions ensure a candidate can easily assimilate into a particular company’s culture.

Innovation

Implementing new ideas to improve the business

- Share an experience where you have had to think outside the box to problem solve and how you would instruct your team to adapt and act accordingly
- What do you do when your tried and tested way of doing things doesn’t work? How quickly have you been able to change your course of action?
- Describe a situation where you were facing an issue and your normal troubleshooting method was not working. What did you do?

Adaptability

Ability to adapt to changing circumstances

- How well do you adapt to structural and/or strategic change in an organisation?
- Give an example of a recent roadblock you faced on a matter, and how you dealt with it?

Accountability

Taking responsibility for actions and decisions both in team and individual projects

- Describe the most successful team project you have worked on so far. What was your contribution and how did you delegate work and support the team?
- Have you ever taken initiative to implement a change, that hasn’t worked out in the way you thought it would? What did you do to rectify the situation?

Communication

Communication style to interact with others effectively and efficiently in the organisation

- Have you ever worked with someone you struggled to communicate with? If so, what was the main obstacle and how did you handle it?
- Describe a time you had to share unfortunate news with your team or had to approach a delicate subject matter with a colleague.
- How do you deal with a challenging client within the business?

Collaboration

Working with colleagues and teams to meet joint goals

- Describe a time your team failed to complete a project on time. If you had the chance, what would you do differently?
- Talk me through a recent project you worked on that was successful as a result of strong communication and collaboration within the legal team?

Resilience

Ability to deal with setbacks and adversity

- What has been your biggest challenge to date and how did you deal with it?
- Talk me through a time when you had to deal with a major crisis or setback

Integrity

Acting with honesty and professionalism, and respecting company policies

- Have you ever faced an ethical dilemma at work? If so, what was the issue and what did you do?



Technical based 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 could face.



Personal/motivational based 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 are you interested in this role?
- How does this role fit your career development in longer term?
- What are the top three factors you attribute to your success?
- What are your most significant accomplishments?
- Where do you see your career developing to in the next 5 to 10 years?



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 left is what each part of the technique means and the approximate percentage of time to dedicate to 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

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

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

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

A

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

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 well thought out interview questions to the table, you'll be able to find out quickly if the job is the right match for you.

You'll also demonstrate that you have taken the time to prepare and that you are interested and enthusiastic about the role.

This is also a good opportunity to probe as to whether they may have any reservations about your candidacy for the role.

Good topics to ask about are:



Specific industry-related questions



Questions that are specific to something you have read about in relation to their business



Company financials



Place in the market

By preparing and doing your homework ahead of the interview, you will be able to put your best foot forward.



About Taylor Root

We are a global legal, tax, and compliance 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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