

What Do You Do When You Don't Hear Back?

Q. Two weeks ago I interviewed for an associate position in a downtown firm. This was my second interview, and I met with five attorneys, including three partners. I thought the interview went very well, and I am still waiting to hear back. Isn't that a bad sign? What should I do?

A. Your situation is not at all unusual. As for what it means, no news is no news. It is impossible to guess whether or not you will ultimately receive an offer.

I have had several clients who went for weeks without hearing and, after becoming increasingly discouraged, were delighted to receive an offer. Others have waited and been disappointed. Generally delays are attributable to busy schedules. Although you can probably think of nothing else, the attorneys you met have dozens of pressing matters and clients who are demanding their attention. Also, it will probably be necessary for the firm to gather input from all of the attorneys with whom you met before a hiring decision can be made. You didn't mention whether you were told what the next step in the process would be. In the future, it is best to ask at the conclusion of the interview when you might expect to hear and whether there is any additional information you could provide.

Assuming that you either weren't given a time frame or that time has already passed, it would probably be best to give one of the attorneys a call. Was there one with whom you felt you had an especially good rapport? When you call, don't express your concern, but instead emphasize your continued interest in the firm and ask if there is anything you could provide -- transcript, references or writing sample (if these weren't provided previously). You might even suggest meeting with more attorneys, if you think that would be helpful. Firms have their own hiring rituals, and for some third and fourth interviews are not uncommon. Keep me posted.

Q. About three weeks ago, I responded to an ad for a corporate counsel position. I believe that I met the qualifications detailed in the ad. I have not heard anything. There was no telephone number listed. Should I call to see whether my resume was received?

A. Unfortunately, the situation you describe is becoming increasingly common. Many of my clients wait weeks or months -- and some never hear at all. Some larger organizations send an email acknowledging receipt of your application and ask that you wait to hear from them (i.e. "Don't call us, we'll call you"). Given your circumstances it probably will not hurt to call once just to see whether your resume was received and where they are in the process. You could place the call to the person to whom you directed your resume or to someone in human resources. Alternatively, you might ask someone to make a call on your behalf to find out whether the position has been filled. I have sometimes made these calls

for my clients so that their names are not associated with the inquiry in the event the company really does not want to hear from the applicants. Finally, was your resume "scannable"? Some companies and large agencies scan and store all resumes in a data bank. If yours was not in the proper format, it may not have been retrievable. It is always a good practice to verify whether a resume must be scannable before submitting it.

Q. In the process of searching for a new position, I have begun networking. Two people I called never returned my telephone calls. I don't know whether to call again, or should I just assume that they don't want to talk to me?

A. Don't immediately assume the worst. Even though we are living in the age of communication, not all of our messages get through. Several times in the past month, I have received voice mails that were not audible. I could not return the calls, and I know the people who left the messages probably assumed that I simply chose not to call them back. Perhaps before calling a second time, you could send an introductory email. Preferably you should begin the email with the magic words, "Your law school classmate, Jamie Smith, recommended that I contact you. . . ." The likelihood that you will receive a response is greatly enhanced if you can introduce yourself through a mutual acquaintance. Of course, you will need to network to find the acquaintance through whom you can then introduce yourself. How? By expanding your circle of friends and acquaintances. If you make two or three attempts in vain, I would probably have to assume the person is too busy to be bothered and find another person to contact.

By Karen J. Summerville, J.D.

206.224.7608

www.legalcareermanagement.com

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