

Effective Interviewing As A Tool For Justice

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Global Alliance for Justice Education Conference, Manila, December 7-13, 2008

What Basics of Interviewing Should Every Law Graduate Know?

Goals of interview with potential client:

- Establish rapport** needed for a working relationship, i.e., gain trust, build connection.
- Gather the information** necessary to understand the nature of the client's problem(s) or matter and to frame solutions for them.
- Learn the client's goal(s).** Remember these may include emotional goals and unstated goals, such as convincing others (e.g., the attorney) of the justness of their cause and maintaining or gaining some control over a life situation.
- Provide information about using a lawyer**, what will happen next, and obtain a commitment from interviewee to go forward, if appropriate. Give client realistic view of the matter, i.e., manage expectations.

Methods:

- Consider the potential impact of the client's culture**, and approach the interview with informed openness on issues such as proxemics, kinesics, time, narrative preferences, relational perspectives (individualism or collectivism), etc. Develop an awareness of your own cultural assumptions and how they influence your work.
- Listen** carefully and actively. Let the person know you have heard both the substance and the emotional content of what she has said. Accept silence-- in yourself and in the interviewee.
- Ask open ended questions**, let interviewee tell story in their own words, with few interruptions.
- Ask clarifying questions**, elicit factual details that may be relevant. Still, do not frame a problem or matter into a legal issue too quickly.
- Tap the client's understanding** of what happened and why. A client is often the best source of strategy, tactics and information for solving a problem.
- When asked a question, answer it.** Watch for issues outside of your expectations and expertise.

Stages of an interview:

- Introduction**, provide brief information as attorney.
- Learning client problem(s) and concern(s)**, eliciting the client story.
- Exploring factual detail**,
- Identifying client goals**; discussing preliminary strategies for solution.
- Conclusion**, including the framework for future cooperation.