

Student Life #3: Interview Week

If this is the first time you are going through the interview process, there might seem to be some mystery in what we do to interview and select our articling students. We think that this process should be as transparent as possible, to ensure that students who apply to our firm understand why we do what we do. After all, you have a vested interest in the process. We also hope that a transparent process relieves some of the stress that interviewing week seems to impose on prospective articling students.

As you will see below, we invest a considerable amount of resources and time in hiring our students. We make this investment because we are looking to hire our future associates and partners. We believe that students are critical to the growth and future of Alexander Holburn and, for that reason, the time and resources are well spent.

What are the Vancouver Bar Association (VBA) Guidelines for articling interviews?

The VBA provides voluntary guidelines as to when students need to submit their applications, when law firms can contact students to book interviews, and when students can be interviewed for both summer and full articles. In a nutshell, the VBA asks that firms conduct interviews only during a designated week. This is usually around the third week of August for articling students and around the third week of October for summer students. Firms that comply with the VBA guidelines are asked not to interview students outside of these designated weeks, although there are a few exceptions.

Vancouver law firms are asked by the VBA to agree to the interviewing guidelines. Most Vancouver firms now do so.

At Alexander Holburn, we have always abided by the VBA guidelines, as we believe that they are for the benefit of students. In our view, while interviewing week is hectic and potentially stressful, it provides students with the best opportunity to compare and contrast the different firms so that they can make an informed decision about where they want to article.

What does interview week look like?

Interview week can be a bit crazy for both students and firms. While everyone's experience is different, here are some general observations made by our students who have recently been through the process.

Although the interviewing process is set for one full week, it really takes place in the first few days. When you start to get calls from firms about scheduling interviews, be prepared to schedule the large majority of your interviews on Monday and Tuesday.

Most interviews will take an hour or so. Although many firms are in Vancouver's downtown core, be sure to allow yourself time to move from firm to firm. You may even wish to map out where your interviews will be before you begin the trek, just to give yourself some comfort that you know where you are going. One student suggested that you hand deliver your applications, so you get a sense of

where all of the firms are located. It also gives you a “sneak peek” as to what the various firms look like, something that will give you more familiarity during interview week.

You can expect that firms will ask you for second interviews and/or lunches or dinners. Sometimes you will be asked during the first interview to come back, other times you will receive a subsequent telephone call. You should therefore leave a number where you can be reached during that week; voice mail is just fine, as long as you check your messages between interviews. Generally, the firms will try to be as accommodating as possible, as they realize you will likely have a schedule full of interviews, particularly in the first few days.

Several firms also arrange receptions during interview week. We have a Wine & Cheese reception for those students we interview for summer positions, usually on the Tuesday evening of October interview week. We discuss this further below. Generally, this provides an excellent opportunity for students to meet members of the firm other than the recruiting committee. Our current students found these events very helpful in making their articling decisions.

For those firms that comply with the VBA Guidelines, offers cannot be made to students until the Thursday morning of interview week. Our students have commented that waiting for and receiving offers is the most stressful part of interview week. Sometimes it can take time for the “phone to ring”. Sometimes students receive offers from one or more firms that are not their “first choice”, and they have to grapple with the stress of waiting to see whether they will receive

another offer before making any decisions. Sometimes students receive several offers and simply cannot determine which is the best firm for them.

To be honest, our recruiting committee also feels stress when it comes to making offers. We only have a few positions available and, usually, we interview many excellent candidates who can fill those positions. By making an offer to one, we are potentially precluding ourselves from making an offer to another. The longer we wait for a response from a student to whom we have made an offer, the more likely it is that the student “next in line” will have accepted an offer from another firm. We suspect that many other firms are in the same position. This may be why you feel some pressure to make a decision as soon as possible. Although you shouldn’t feel pressured, we are all trying to ensure that we hire the students that will be the best “fit” for our respective firms.

At Alexander Holburn, we try to be as open about this process as possible and try to keep our candidates informed. If you interview with us, please remember that the lines of communication are always open. Don’t feel that you have to wait for a call from us in order to make an articling decision – call us! We are pleased to let you know where we are at in the process, so you have the most information available to make a decision.

Do you have any tips for interview week?

Our students have suggested the following:

- Do your research about the firms, or at least review the research you have already conducted, a few

days before interview week. Don't leave this to the last minute.

- Eat a good breakfast and get a good sleep the night before interviews.
- Try to get to an interview a few minutes early, to give yourself some time to relax and collect your thoughts. A few minutes in the reception area can also provide you with an opportunity to see how people who work at a firm relate to one another in an everyday setting; this can provide valuable information on the culture of the firm.
- Leave a contact number where you can be reached during the day and check your voicemail messages between interviews.
- Try to leave yourself a few minutes after each interview to collect your thoughts about the firm. Make notes, if possible, as it will be more difficult to remember the nuances of each interview at the end of a busy interviewing day.
- If you are interested in a firm with which you have interviewed, contact them after the interview to let them know that you are interested. An email is likely fine, although you can provide a "thank you" note or simply call the person with whom you interviewed.
- Prepare to be asked for lunches or dinners. You will often be asked if you want a drink or wine with a meal. Do accept such invitations if you like, but be careful you don't drink too much. It could have an impact upon the impression you make that night and the morning after.

Do you offer firm tours prior to interview week?

No, we generally do not offer firm tours. We invest a great deal of time in the two interview weeks and try to focus our efforts in that regard. However, if you do have questions about us before interviewing week, please contact our Director of Associates and Students, Christine York.

When do you notify people about interviews?

The deadlines for our applications are set by the VBA Guidelines. Last year, the dates were June 30 for articling applications and September 15 for summer student applications. We also wait until a date is set by the VBA to contact students to book interviews. Last year those dates were July 15 for articling positions and September 30 for summer positions. We always let people know whether they do or do not have an interview, so either way you will hear from us. Those students to whom we offer interviews are contacted by telephone; those students who are not offered an interview should receive a letter.

If you have not heard from us within one week of these deadlines and are getting anxious, please contact our Director of Associates and Students, Christine York.

Do you tell students whom they will be interviewing with? What are your thoughts on researching your interviewer?

If you will be interviewing with Alexander Holburn, you will receive a telephone call to book a time for an interview. Once the interview is booked, you will receive a letter a few days later, confirming the time of the interview and whom you will be interviewing with. Generally, we line up

all of our candidates with two lawyers from our firm. If you have expressed an interest in a certain area of the law, we try to match you with at least one lawyer who practises in that area.

Please note, however, that our schedule can sometimes change between the date the letter is sent and the date of the interview. Sometimes the lawyer that you are set to interview with is unavailable on the date of the interview and substitutions will be made. We apologize in advance if this happens to you.

Bearing that in mind, you may wish to review the web biography of the lawyers that you will be interviewing with, simply to give you some familiarity with who you will be talking to. However, we do not have any expectations that you will know about us personally when you come to the interview. We are happy to answer questions about what we do and our history/experience with Alexander Holburn. Do not feel as if you need to study our background or practice.

Who is on your recruiting committee? How is it selected?

Our committee is composed of Alexander Holburn lawyers in various stages of their careers, from most of our practice groups. In September 2008, the committee was as follows. You can find out more about these people through our website.

- Christine York, Director of Associates and Students
- Anita Atwal
- Patrick Cleary
- Michael Dery
- Christopher Hirst
- Loren Mallett

- Robert McLennan
- Tim Outerbridge
- Jeremy Poole
- Alan Ross
- Susan Sangha
- Emily Stock
- Ingrid Tsui
- Eileen Vanderburgh

What can I expect in an Alexander Holburn interview?

Generally, your first interview will consist of two half-hour sessions, each with a different lawyer. How the interview unfolds beyond this will depend very much on with whom you interview. Interviewers on the Alexander Holburn recruiting committee all come from different backgrounds and have different interview styles.

We can say that all members of our recruiting committee prefer a relaxed, conversational type of interview. We like to speak with - not at - our candidates. Be prepared to answer questions about yourself, based on your application and career goals. Be prepared to ask questions of us, to help you assess whether Alexander Holburn is a place you would like to work. Our hope is that these questions will form the basis for a natural flowing conversation, so we can each get to know one another better.

How many people will I meet during the interview process?

This can vary considerably, often depending upon time constraints. Generally, we try to introduce our candidates to as many people on the recruiting committee as possible. We believe this gives you a better

introduction to the firm and also allows us to make more informed hiring decisions.

Do you introduce interviewing students to existing articling students?

We are always pleased to introduce articling candidates to our current students. If we neglect to offer you such an introduction in the interview, please do not hesitate to ask.

Do you give second interviews?

We often give second interviews, although that is not always the case. Our goal is to introduce our candidates to as many people on the recruiting committee as possible. Sometimes that can be accomplished in a first interview, so that a second interview is not necessary. Also, simply due to time constraints, second interviews are not always an option with all candidates.

Do you invite students out for lunch or dinner?

Sometimes. This will depend very much on time constraints. It is rare that we invite our summer student candidates to dinner, because we invite all students to our student reception on the Tuesday night.

Do you have a student reception?

Yes, we invite all of the students we interview for a summer student position to a Wine & Cheese reception on the Tuesday night of interview week.

We strongly encourage those students interested in Alexander Holburn to attend

this reception. As you may have guessed if you have reviewed our website, we pride ourselves on the people at our firm. Almost all of our lawyers attend the reception. This gives students an opportunity to meet almost everyone, not just those on the recruiting committee. It really is the best place to get a sense of who makes up Alexander Holburn.

The reception also provides an opportunity for students to meet everyone on the student recruiting committee. This allows the committee to make more informed hiring decisions.

How do you make hiring decisions?

The student selection process is an evolving one that takes place throughout articling week.

Our recruiting committee meets periodically through the interviewing process to talk about the candidates and who we believe would be a “fit” at Alexander Holburn. To find out more about our hiring perspective, please see our website.

From those discussions, we begin an informal list of those candidates we feel would perform well at Alexander Holburn. We rarely make any decisions until we have interviewed all candidates once, which usually means that nothing is decided before Wednesday morning.

When all interviews are completed, we sit down and try to formalize our list. The interview itself is a very significant factor in our decision making process, although we still have regard to the resumes, cover letters, and grades. As we have noted before, we are looking for people

who we would feel comfortable introducing to and working with our clients. That factor is key in our decision making process.

How do you notify students about hiring decisions?

All of the students we interview are called during interview week about their status, whether they are offered a position or not.

Students are also welcome to contact us during interview week to find out where we are at in the process. Please do not hesitate to call one of the lawyers with whom you interviewed or, alternatively, our Director of Associates and Students, Christine York.