

Demystifying the Thank You Note

by Lauren Pearlman

During the recruiting season, candidates ask a host of questions, from "What can I do to prepare for the interview?" to "What is the best color of tie to wear?" Without a doubt, the most common question that I receive is, "Should I send a thank you note?" Candidates often experience a great deal of anxiety about whether to write a follow-up note and what to write in one. In this article, I'll address the 5 W's of the thank you note in an effort to dispel some of that anxiety and help candidates to make the most of this step in the recruiting process.

Here is advice I would share with interviewees:

Why?

At the outset, many candidates wonder if it's worth it to send a thank you note. Isn't it just another place where I could potentially mess up? No. In today's legal market, it is more important than ever that you take every opportunity possible to make yourself stand out against other candidates. You'll want to get as much time in front of the firm and your interviewers as possible, and writing a thank you note is just another way to remind the firm of why you're the right candidate instead of someone else. You'll have to spend the extra time and care to ensure that the thank you note is perfectly executed without any errors, but this is a small price to pay to have another chance to impress the employer. Neglecting to thank your interviewer is simply an opportunity lost.

Who?

Once you decide to write a thank you note, the next question is to whom you should write it. If you don't have a lot of time, you should focus

your efforts on contacting the most senior person **with whom you interviewed.** **If, however, you can** dedicate some time to this process, it's best to send a thank you note to everyone you met during your interview. This includes all of your interviewers **as well as the recruiting contact or secretary who** greeted you at the firm. Everyone you met is a potential reviewer, and you'll want to ensure that all of them have a favorable impression of you. If you do cast a wide net, try to differentiate the notes you send to each individual, adding in specifics that relate to your meeting with each person. That way, if the note gets passed around, the recipients will still feel your sincerity, rather than realizing that you sent an identical note to others in the firm.

What?

Now on to the heart of the question: What should I write? First, reinforce why you're the right person for the position. Reiterate why your particular background and personality fit with the practice of **the organization.** **Second, answer any unanswered questions and follow up on any substantive areas** you discussed. For example, if you were asked a question and feel that you didn't have the time to properly respond or, in hindsight, wish you had answered differently, use this opportunity to clarify your response. Of course, keep it succinct so that you're not drawing more attention to the open issue, but you should feel free to use this as a forum to close any gaps. Or, if you discussed the Dodd-Frank bill during your interview, you might send a link to an article you recently read that has **an interesting perspective on its enforcement.** These types of follow-up will show the interviewer that you're genuinely interested in the firm and make you stand apart. Third, demonstrate that you understand the practice. Every organization is different, and lawyers will want to know that you

understood and digested the nature of their practice. If a lawyer explains that the firm focuses primarily on cross-border M&A, you should discuss that in the thank you note. Lastly, try to remind the **interviewer of a connection you made when you met**. If you discussed your shared passion for the Yankees, mention the big Yankees' win later that evening. Reminding the interviewer of some connection you made will evoke positive feelings in **the interviewer**.

When?

It's best to write a follow-up note as soon as possible after the interview. Some organizations will discuss your candidacy a week after your interview, while others will make a decision that evening. Since it will be difficult for you to know the **timeline for each organization in advance, the best approach is to send a follow-up note immediately after an interview**.

Where?

Always send the thank you note via email rather than to the lawyer's mailing address. While a handwritten thank you note is a thoughtful gesture, it is impractical in this day and age. Emailing the note will ensure that it gets to the recipient before a decision has been made on your candidacy, and it also enables the recipients to forward it on to others within the firm.

The main point of sending a thank you note is to differentiate oneself from other candidates, so feel free to bend the guidelines I lay out and get creative. The key is to realize the opportunity that exists and take advantage of it. Hopefully, you'll turn your thank you note into an offer letter!

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