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Ronald E. Wheeler

*Boston University School of Law*

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# Choosing the Top Candidate: Best Practices in Academic Law Library Hiring\*

Ronald E. Wheeler,\*\* Nancy P. Johnson,\*\*\* and Terrance K. Manion\*\*\*\*

*The authors discuss successful hiring practices in academic law libraries. Their discussion details each step of the hiring process, from vacancy to offer, and explores strategies for implementing the steps successfully. The processes examined include: reviewing the vacancy, assessing the library needs, forming an effective search committee, writing a winning job description, checking references, conducting an interview, and making an offer. The authors assert that a successful hire will influence every aspect of your library and, as such, a library needs to devote considerable attention and resources to librarian searches.*

## Introduction

¶1 Most librarians have read articles and attended several professional meetings on the “graying” of the profession.<sup>1</sup> Most also know how tight the market is for recruiting law librarians. Both of these factors set the tone for a very competitive law librarian-hiring situation. Fresh from three successful librarian searches in just one year, the authors want to share successful hiring practices with the law library community.

¶2 All librarians, whether they have recently, or never, hired librarians, will tell you that librarians who work as a team provide a productive and collegial environment. If you hire competent, energetic librarians who work well with your existing librarians, they can positively affect every aspect of your library’s operations. Hiring successful people is important in all areas of the library: technical, public, and electronic services.

¶3 This article begins with a common situation: an academic law library has a vacancy. In a very fortunate library, this vacancy will be a new position. More frequently, the position will be an existing one. This article addresses vacancies as opportunities to reassess library needs and existing librarian responsibilities. It deals with the pre-interview process, the on-site interview, and making the job offer. It is also appropriate to devote a few words to what this article will not

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\*\* Associate Director for Public Services, Georgia State University College of Law Library.

\*\*\* Law Librarian and Professor of Law, Georgia State University College of Law Library.

\*\*\*\* Librarian and Director of Information Technology, Georgia State University College of Law Library.

1. E.g., Penny A. Hazelton, *Help Wanted: Ensuring the Survival of Law Librarianship*, AALL SPECTRUM, Oct. 1999, at 17; BUREAU OF LABOR STAT., U.S. DEP’T. OF LABOR, LIBRARIANS (2007), available at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/pdf/ocos068.pdf>.

address: the law related to hiring, involving the human resources department in the hiring process, or promoting from within the library.

### Vacancies as Opportunities

¶4 With the prospect of a vacancy, the library must analyze the responsibilities associated with the position. You should review the duties and responsibilities of a position each time the position becomes available. Even if you filled the position as recently as two years ago, circumstances change very rapidly in an era of high-technology libraries. You will most likely alter the position to fill your current and planned needs.

¶5 Perhaps even more challenging than defining the job responsibilities is the need to focus on the skills necessary for success in the position. By focusing on skills, you have a clear sense of the qualities needed in the candidate. This analysis should precede the development of a job description.

¶6 In your analysis of the position, you have to ask difficult questions:

- Is the position suited to an entry-level librarian or a more experienced librarian?
- What education requirements are necessary?
- What are the specific skills needed to be successful?
- To whom should the librarian report?
- Who should the librarian supervise?
- Can a support staff person, rather than a librarian, handle the job tasks?
- Could current librarians assume some of the vacant position's tasks?
- Will all unwanted or problem responsibilities be cast into this new vacancy?
- What is the relationship between this position and the other positions in the library?
- How can you mold the current job to cover tasks involving quickly changing technology?

¶7 Necessary education and prior experience are generally easy to define. If the position has teaching responsibilities and direct contact with faculty, it usually requires a J.D. Virtually all librarian positions in academic law libraries require an M.L.S. If the position includes supervisory duties and decision-making responsibilities, it will warrant a more experienced librarian. On the other hand, librarians with little or no experience can infuse new enthusiasm into a library.

¶8 The more difficult questions involve the intangible requirements of the job. What does it mean when someone says that a person is "really suitable for the job" or that the person is "the right fit"? When you talk about "fitting in," you must understand the culture of your library.<sup>2</sup> If you value a good public service attitude

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2. STEVE SPRINGER, STOP HIRING FAILURES! 4 (2006).

and initiative in your library, these types of intangible qualities are required for a person to fit in. If the candidate has good experience, but is not interested in doing anything beyond what is initially expected, the hire will probably not be successful. If the librarians value traditional ways of approaching services, an energetic, technologically savvy librarian may not fit in. If the librarians have positive attitudes, hiring a seemingly negative person will also not provide a good fit.

¶9 It is difficult to determine these intangible qualities during an interview, but if you ask the correct questions, you may succeed. According to the literature, one of the best predictors of future success is past behavior.<sup>3</sup> It is very important to craft interview questions that address specific behaviors. You also have to be careful that these qualities are job-related, and not based on personal bias.

### **The Pre-Interview Search**

¶10 Each component of the pre-interview search should promote your institution and the position, thereby increasing the number and quality of your applicants.

### **Search Committee**

¶11 Once you determine the responsibilities and requirements of the position, you should assemble a search committee. We have found it better to err on the side of under-inclusion than over-inclusion when building the committee. Large hiring committees often become difficult to schedule, negotiate, and manage. It is also problematic and counterproductive to pack a hiring committee with an entire department due to fear of leaving anyone out. Uncomfortable moments explaining to coworkers that they have not been selected to sit on the search committee are worth enduring to avoid creating a monolithic committee. Paraprofessional staff unfamiliar with the responsibilities and requirements of librarians may not be well suited to sit on a librarian search committee.

¶12 An effective and efficient hiring committee generally should include:

- the library director or associate director
- the position's supervisor
- a librarian peer
- a faculty member or administrator
- a college or university counterpart or collaborator when appropriate

¶13 A librarian's work is not limited to inside the library; thus, it is important to consider how a librarian position touches departments, units, clinics, and service centers throughout the law school. An Electronic Services or Emerging Technologies

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3. See LOU ADLER, *HIRE WITH YOUR HEAD: USING PERFORMANCE-BASED HIRING TO BUILD GREAT TEAMS* 153–54 (3d ed. 2007).

Librarian needs to collaborate with the law school's IT department. An Acquisitions Librarian needs to work with the school's business and finance office. A Faculty Services Librarian needs to work with not only the faculty, but also faculty support. After completing the inventory, if there is a well-defined connection with a particular unit in the law school, inviting a member of that unit to sit on the hiring committee goes a long way toward ensuring buy-in. Getting the perspective of someone outside of the library can also provide valuable insight to the committee.

### Job Descriptions

¶14 While the library's administration or director will define the position's responsibilities, the search committee will compose the job description. The committee should vary the job description for different types of media and audiences.<sup>4</sup> Highlight aspects of the job that differ from competing positions. For example, some library reference positions do not work weekend hours. Job descriptions detailing these positions should stress that while there may be evening responsibilities, there are no weekend responsibilities.

¶15 When writing the job description, you will find it worthwhile to provide glowing details about the setting. In addition to presenting information that may be common knowledge (i.e., the South enjoys mild winters; the Midwest enjoys a low cost of living), addressing common misconceptions will go a long way toward selling your location. These may include the idea that small towns lack diversity and cultural events or that big cities suffer from long commutes and a high cost of living. Neither of these characterizations is helpful to recruiting and can be quickly dispelled with some elaboration, such as "small college town X enjoys a diverse population and hosts a wide variety of annual cultural events, including a world-class opera and classical music performances," or "big city Y has a number of unique and affordable neighborhoods within the city and enjoys a low cost of living compared to other cities its size." It is naive to think that location is not a major factor in applicant decisions, and taking any opportunity to sell your location or dispel common misconceptions will assist in increasing your applicant pool.<sup>5</sup>

### Where and How to Post the Position

¶16 Law librarianship—in particular, academic law librarianship—is a relatively small professional community. Posting a job vacancy in a few high-traffic online sources will reach most practicing law librarians looking for new employment

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4. See Laura Sachs Hills, *Creating Job Descriptions and a Job Applicant Wish List*, 18 J. MED. PRAC. MGMT. 275, 276 (2003) (suggesting saving and studying recruitment ads from other practices).

5. See Iowa City: Beyond the Corn, <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/about/employment/video.html> (last visited Sept. 4, 2007) (providing an example of a creative way to promote a job location).

opportunities. These resources include the AALL Job Placement Hotline,<sup>6</sup> the Law Librarian Blog's Special Interest Section,<sup>7</sup> other professional e-mail distribution lists, and AALL chapter Web sites.<sup>8</sup> However, reaching new library and law school graduates takes additional effort. Most library schools have an electronic job bulletin board or a career services office that manages a traditional bulletin board. Visiting the *ALA-Accredited Graduate Programs in Library Science with Law Library Classes or Joint MLS/JD Classes* Web site<sup>9</sup> (prepared by the AALL Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education) can point you to regional library schools or library schools with an emphasis on law librarianship.

¶17 A common and worthwhile practice is to provide an exhaustive job description on the law school's Web site and post a customized, shorter description elsewhere with a hyperlink directing interested candidates to the longer description. This approach offers some specific benefits.

¶18 First, it allows you to customize posts according to audience, publication, and budget. Library school posts can include a note that entry-level librarians are encouraged to apply. You can write blog posts to mirror the formal or conversational style of the blog. Use shorter posts for resources that charge by the word.

¶19 Second, this practice makes it easy to manage and update application deadlines and extensions or clarify questions in the description with a single edit. By having a centralized job post you do not need to update the information in multiple locations. However, as a courtesy one should set apart changes and updates with bold text or some other formatting style to alert the returning applicant that there have been changes.

¶20 Third, this practice lends itself to some rather useful data collection opportunities. Having a centralized post makes it easy to monitor the number of times the job description is viewed. This will provide the library with helpful information and can be compared to the number of applications received. A centralized post also yields useful information that can be used when preparing your next job search. In addition to discovering how many unique visits there have been, you can also learn what resources visitors are using to link to your job posting. Finding that most applicants who viewed your job description linked from the AALL Job Placement Hotline, Law Librarian Blog, or library school bulletin boards<sup>10</sup> can be helpful when planning future job searches. While this is an inexact method of data

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6. Am. Ass'n of Law Libraries, AALL Job Placement Hotline, <http://www.aallnet.org/hotline/hotline.asp> (last visited Sept. 4, 2007).
  7. Law Librarian Blog, [http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/law\\_librarian\\_blog](http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/law_librarian_blog) (last visited Sept. 4, 2007).
  8. See, e.g., SEAALL: Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries, <http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/seaall> (last visited Sept. 4, 2007).
  9. Am. Ass'n of Law Libraries, ALA-Accredited Graduate Programs in Library Science with Law Library Classes or Joint MLD/JD Classes, <http://www.aallnet.org/committee/tfedu> (last visited Sept. 4, 2007).
  10. See, e.g., Indiana University School of Library and Information Science, <http://www.slis.indiana.edu/careers> (last visited Sept. 4, 2007).

collection, the information gleaned, when included with other data collection methods, will help refine future searches.

¶21 Collecting nonidentifiable data—such as how many people view a job description and from what employment resource they are linking to your job description—comfortably falls within common Web site monitoring practices. Nonetheless, be cautious when collecting more user-specific details, such as IP addresses, that can be used to identify visitors. As stated above, we work in a small professional community, and information about a person's job hunting should be considered sensitive. In addition, while you cannot expect anonymity when on the Internet, we hope we can offer confidentiality in job searches as a professional courtesy.

### **Communicating with Applicants**

¶22 When the applications begin to roll in, it is important to communicate with the applicants at a couple of points during the pre-interview process. In doing so, be responsive and honest. It reflects poorly on an institution and a search committee chair when applicants are uncertain of their status. During these pre-interview communications with the applicants, you will gain an insight into the applicant's professional and personal communication style.

¶23 The first point of communication is when you receive the application. Send out a letter within two business days confirming your receipt of the application and a general timeline for the reviewing of applications. If an applicant does not meet the minimum requirements of the position (education, years of service, date available to start, etc.), a different letter should be sent, again within two business days, informing the applicant that he or she will not be considered for this position and why. This correspondence is not the same as a letter informing a qualified candidate that they are not included in your final interview pool, which would occur later in the interviewing process. It is a good practice to ask applicants to keep the library in mind for future job openings and wish them luck in their current job search.

¶24 If an application is sent via e-mail, send out a letter, but as a courtesy also reply by e-mail, stating that the application was received. Unfortunately, the assumption that all e-mail sent is received and read is overly optimistic. With more aggressive spam filters, smaller file size limits, network instability, and user e-mail account capacity limits, e-mail correspondence can be lost, misfiled, or detained on its way to its addressee. A quick e-mail reply will save the applicant from having to suffer the anxiety of wondering if the e-mail arrived. With this being said, if applicants can submit their materials via e-mail, the chair of the committee or other point of contact should be diligent in monitoring junk and spam mail filters as well as being aware of any account capacity limits and any network instability

that may affect e-mail service. Despite these extra burdens, e-mail is an efficient way of submitting and receiving job applications.

¶25 A second point of contact with candidates during the pre-interview process should occur before you begin checking a candidate's references. A committee member can call to alert a candidate that he or she made your short list and that you will begin calling references. This practice is appreciated by the candidate and helps with the reference check process. Candidates often are in contact with their references to inform them that you will be contacting them shortly as well as to provide some information about the position. This telephone call is also a good time to ask about speaking to contacts not included on the reference list, discuss any concerns the candidate might have, and prepare a timeline for when the committee can contact these references.

### Checking References

¶26 A basic reference check involves contacting the references the candidate provides the committee; however, a thorough and more helpful reference check requires a search committee to speak with librarians and administrators who have worked with the candidate in different capacities and who were not included on the candidate's reference list. In particular, it is in the committee's best interest to contact those references glaringly absent from the reference list (direct supervisors and current and former library directors). It is unsettling how few search committees go beyond the submitted reference list when soliciting information about a candidate.

¶27 An effective approach to reaching references is by phone, but cold calling references can be problematic. If you do reach them, they are rarely prepared to discuss the candidate on the spot. Instead, send an e-mail to introduce yourself and request a time to call to discuss the candidate and the position. This is a far more efficient way to initiate a reference interview and provides the reference time to prepare for the discussion.

¶28 Before calling references, the committee should compile some prepared questions.<sup>11</sup> This will give the committee a better basis for comparing candidates, especially if different people conduct the reference checks.

¶29 Reference questions might include:

- How long have you known the candidate and in what capacity?
- Please discuss the candidate's overall work experience, giving examples of his/her ability to work independently and with increasingly expanding responsibilities.

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11. See, e.g., ADLER, *supra* note 3, at 171–73; Laura Sachs, *Gathering Useful Opinions about the Job Applicant*, 17 J. MED. PRAC. MGMT. 254 (2002).

- Please describe the extent of experience the candidate has had with the following job-related duties [list responsibilities for the position].
- Please give an example of a situation in which the candidate demonstrated creative problem-solving and initiative.
- Please comment on the candidate's interpersonal and communication skills, giving examples of his or her success in these areas.
- What do you consider the candidate's greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- How would you describe the candidate's relationship with peers?
- Is there someone else you think we should contact?
- Is there anything else you think we should know about the candidate?

¶30 It is a good practice to have both the candidate's resumé and your list of questions in front of you when calling references. Keep in mind that you are having a conversation with the reference. The prepared questions are a guide and not a script. You will learn more about the candidate if you follow the natural progression of the conversation rather than rattling off questions in an interrogative style, leaving little time for references to elaborate. If you skip or miss a question, wait until a suitable time in the conversation to revisit it.

¶31 Your behavior with the reference may affect an applicant's impression of you as an employer. References are likely to discuss their conversation with the applicant, and applicants are likely to share their impressions with others seeking employment in law libraries, both now and in the future. Thus, it is important to remember that you are recruiting for not only the current position, but future positions as well.

¶32 Committees are sometimes reluctant to contact librarians who were not included in a candidate's reference list. While you do not need written consent to contact additional references, informing the candidate that you will be doing so is a simple courtesy. There are instances when candidates would not want to inform their supervisor or director that they are applying for a position until they have made a search committee's short list. Provide a candidate time to inform the supervisor or library director that you will be contacting them. You do not want to disclose prematurely an applicant's intention to leave.

¶33 One author suggests that good reference checks are the best way to prevent hiring mistakes.<sup>12</sup> However important they are, you cannot make your decision on a candidate solely on a positive reference check. Pay attention to neutral or negative comments from references. Lukewarm comments speak to the former employer's lack of praise for the candidate. If you are already sold on the candidate, you may ignore negative data, which could be a very costly mistake.

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12. ADLER, *supra* note 3, at 174.

## Phone Interviews of Candidates

¶34 There are a number of reasons search committees use telephone interviews:

- narrowing the candidate pool to finalists
- saving cost of travel
- verifying the candidate matches the resumé
- clarifying ambiguous or confusing resumé points
- “test driving” the candidates to see if they would be compatible with the expectations of the position
- selling your position to the candidate

¶35 These interviews provide limited information and as such should be no longer than forty-five minutes, preferably closer to half an hour. The conversation often proves awkward and difficult with an entire committee on the line. A common practice is to designate a lead interviewer and allow that person to do most of the talking. This curtails the problem of speaking over one another.

¶36 From a telephone interview, you can garner two pieces of information. First, what is the candidate’s communication style? Keeping the conversation light and using open-ended questions allows the candidate to elaborate on a topic. You can get a sense of how he or she manages a conversation. Second, you can learn if the candidate meets your minimum requirements for the position. Asking the candidate to elaborate on the resumé provides clarification. Learning whether “provides legal training for students and faculty” means the candidate developed and hosted formal bibliographic instruction sessions or works one-on-one with patrons at the reference desk can reveal if the candidate has the experience required.

## Selecting the Pool

¶37 A number of human resource materials—including books, articles, and Web sites—address the issue of interpreting applicants’ resúmes and identifying “red flags.”<sup>13</sup> Some reoccurring red flags include:

- job-hopping<sup>14</sup>
- large gaps in work history
- typos, misspellings, or grammatical mistakes
- lack of progress or promotion
- inconsistencies between job titles and responsibilities
- vague job titles, descriptions, and claims

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13. See, e.g., KATHY SHWIFF, BEST PRACTICES: HIRING PEOPLE: RECRUIT AND KEEP THE BRIGHTEST STARS 48–49 (2007).

14. For an interesting discussion of job-hopping, see HOROWITZ, *supra* note 11, at 223.

- rounding off dates
- large section devoted to hobbies

¶38 One practice is to identify the moment when the candidate decided to become a librarian and to evaluate the resumé from that point forward. We have all found this profession via different roads. Some always knew they were going to be librarians; others stumbled upon the profession after a couple of other careers. While pre-library work can shed light on one's work style and ethic, it is not necessarily directly applicable to library work.

¶39 You should examine applicant resúmes carefully in order to select the best possible pool. A well-written resumé can tell you a lot about an applicant. There are standard elements that every resumé should contain. Educational qualifications (including educational institutions, degrees, and major areas of study) and previous work experience (including jobs held, and dates of employment) are among the most important.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, applicants should list any scholarships, awards, or honors received.<sup>16</sup> Look for these elements when examining resúmes. You should decide how heavily to weigh each of these categories of information before screening applicants. For example, if you are looking for an experienced librarian, prior work experience may be more important to you than honors and awards. Professional development activities are also highly valued among law librarians because they indicate collegiality, commitment, and service to the profession. Decide in advance how to weigh professional memberships, offices, and committee work.

¶40 Avoid such classic mistakes as being overly impressed by educational credentials from particular academic institutions or programs. Academic credentials are important, especially in academic law libraries where both a J.D. and an M.L.S. are often required. Schools and programs develop good academic reputations partly because their graduates fare well in the job market. Nevertheless, applicants holding degrees from particularly prestigious schools are not always superior to other applicants.<sup>17</sup>

¶41 Cover letters are an even more valuable tool for screening applicants. There are essential elements and suggested techniques for writing cover letters.<sup>18</sup> Familiarize yourself with these elements before you begin screening applicants. Even more importantly, however, look for the following features in applicant cover letters. Cover letters should:

- address all of the expected job duties and discuss the applicant's related experience with each duty

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15. See Kevin L. Hutchinson, *Personnel Administrators' Preferences for Résumé Content: A Survey and Review of Empirically Based Conclusions*, J. BUS. COMM., Fall 1984, at 6.

16. See *id.*

17. See HOROWITZ, *supra* note 11, at 225.

18. See RICHARD H. BEATTY, THE PERFECT COVER LETTER 37, 74 (3d ed. 2004).

- summarize other previous relevant work experience
- discuss significant job-related accomplishments
- address particularly significant professional development experiences such as major offices held or major committee appointments
- express excitement or enthusiasm for the profession
- discuss specific interest in the position

¶42 Beyond the features listed above, consider aesthetics and grammar. A poorly worded, badly formatted, or otherwise chaotic cover letter indicates a less-than-careful applicant.

¶43 Recent studies indicate that librarians consider the following factors critical in assessing librarian job candidates (listed in order of importance):

- service orientation
- post-MLS work experience
- personality/demeanor
- personal/professional appearance
- internship(s), work study experience(s)
- MLS program attended<sup>19</sup>

You should develop your own list of factors suited to your particular library's environment.

### How Many to Interview

¶44 Once you have narrowed the pool of applicants by eliminating those who do not meet the job requirements and by selecting those who stand out in some way, you must decide on the number of candidates to interview. Several variables may factor into this decision: cost, staff time, competing events, and deadlines.

¶45 The cost of interviewing candidates can be significant. Travel, hotel, meals, and other incidental costs are generally absorbed by the law library or law school conducting the search. Thus, you can interview only the number of candidates that your budget can sustain. Nevertheless, cost should not preclude the selection of the best candidates available.

¶46 One way of managing travel costs is to schedule interviews well in advance. This will allow candidates to secure advanced-purchase airline discounts and avoid last-minute price increases. Universities may have preferred air carriers or preferred hotels that offer special rates. Choosing local candidates who do not require hotel stays or significant travel reimbursements may allow you to increase the number of candidates interviewed. Remember that although the candidates need comfortable and convenient lodgings, top-of-the-line, premium accommodations

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19. Stephen T. Bajjaly, *Contemporary Recruitment in Traditional Libraries*, 46 J. EDUC. LIBR. & INFO. SCI. 53, 56 (2005).

are not required. Offering candidates one night of lodging (typically the night before the interview) and ending the interview in time to have candidates depart on the evening of the interview is certainly an acceptable way to manage costs.

¶47 The staff time involved in orchestrating successful candidate interviews is considerable. Planning travel, lodging, meals, and the like all require administrative time. When a candidate is on-site for an interview, that candidate becomes the focus of that day's efforts. All other projects, meetings, or other commitments may have to take a back seat. This is certainly true for key personnel involved in the interviewing process, but it may also be true, to a lesser degree, for the entire library staff. Strive to maximize staff input into the hiring process by providing opportunities for all library staff to interact with each candidate. Attendance at interviewing meetings, candidate presentations, and candidate meals will require a commitment of time by staff. You may have to be flexible with staff productivity expectations and deadlines during the interview season. Staff should be encouraged to discuss the candidates and review their relative desirability. Staff members who are engaged in the interview process will spend time, even after the interviews, pondering the candidates. Consider these issues when deciding on the number of interviews to conduct.

¶48 If you have three candidates left once you narrow the pool and consider the factors above, you may choose to interview all three of them. Based on our experience, three is the optimal size for an interview pool. Therefore, if you are fortunate enough to have more than three viable candidates remaining, you may need to narrow the pool even further.

### Courtesy Interviews

¶49 There is considerable debate in the literature on the value of courtesy interviews. A courtesy interview is an interview given to an inside candidate who, in all likelihood, will not be offered the job.<sup>20</sup> Some human resources experts assert that "any current employees who are even close to matching your criteria should be interviewed for the position."<sup>21</sup> They argue that "insiders deserve the opportunity to show what they can do in an interview."<sup>22</sup> However, interviewing candidates who have no serious chance of getting the job wastes money and staff time, and it may seriously erode staff morale. If you think that an internal candidate's interview may persuade you that he or she is a viable candidate, you should consider granting the interview. If, on the other hand, you would never hire the internal candidate for your position, you should not grant a courtesy interview.

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20. Jean Dowdall, *Does the Internal Candidate Have the Edge?*, CHRON. CAREERS, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Apr. 7, 2000, available at <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2000/04/2000040701c/careers.html>.

21. SPRINGER, *supra* note 2, at 9.

22. Dowdall, *supra* note 20.

## **On-site Interview**

¶50 The decision whether to hire or not hire an applicant stems directly from the on-site interview. The structure of a site visit will vary from one institution to the next; however, the visits will contain similar components. A carefully planned interview will afford you numerous opportunities to glean useful information from your applicants. Formal interviewing sessions, presentations, and informal social gatherings will allow you to interact with the applicants in a variety of settings and aid you in making a well-informed decision.

### ***Orchestration and Scheduling***

¶51 Depending on the size of your library, drafting a workable schedule for each candidate's interview can be difficult. You should draft interview schedules with an eye toward maximizing the number of library staff the interviewees meet. Schedule group meetings and presentations at a time when staff can attend. Distribute schedules to the library staff well in advance, so they can arrange their schedules to accommodate the interviews. Schedule meetings with law school deans or others outside the library well in advance for the same reason. Knowledgeable personnel who can answer questions and provide insights should conduct law library and law school tours. If possible, schedule candidate presentations early in the day. This will allow library staff and others to formulate questions or initiate conversations that relate to the interviewees' topics. In addition, scheduling the presentations early in the day will allow the candidates to relax and not have the stress of an upcoming speech hanging over their heads. A typical law library interview might include some or all of the following parts:

- welcome and brief initial meeting
- law library tour
- law school tour
- presentation by candidate followed by Q &A
- meeting with technical services staff
- meeting with public services staff (these meetings can be combined if preferred)
- separate meeting with professional librarians
- meeting with the person who will be directly supervising the candidate
- meeting with the library director (if that is different from above)
- meeting with a few members of the law school faculty
- meeting with the law school dean
- meeting with law school student leaders or other students
- lunch with selected librarians the day of the interview
- dinner with selected librarians (the night before the interview is strongly recommended)

¶52 Law school tours are a great way to show off a new or interesting building, a particularly friendly faculty, or a unique campus. Tours are also a good opportunity to involve associate deans or facilities managers: people who can elaborate on building functions and features. If you want your candidates to meet law school faculty, organize short drop-in sessions for interested faculty to meet candidates. Faculty then have the flexibility to stop by to meet the candidates without scheduling extended meeting times. You can do the same for student groups or student leaders such as the Student Bar Association or the law review.

¶53 Assign one point person or coordinator the task of orchestrating each interview day. That coordinator should make sure that meetings begin and end on time, that library staff remember to attend group meetings, that the candidates have water and bathroom breaks, and that any needed equipment is available for the candidates' presentations. The coordinator should also escort the candidates to and from all meetings and deposit the candidates at the airport, in a taxi, or on public transportation once the interviews have ended. Keep in mind that candidates have come partly to assess and critique you as an employer. A well-orchestrated interview experience will go a long way toward impressing interviewees; a clumsy, awkward interview experience full of mishaps will make you less attractive as an employer.

### *The Presentation*

¶54 Requiring candidates to make a presentation as part of the interview process is a common practice in academic libraries. Presentations should be required for all professional jobs in law libraries, including technical services, public services, and computing services. You should have clear goals that you hope to achieve or insights that you hope to gain from the presentation. If the position requires teaching, a presentation affords you the chance to see the candidate function in a teaching or public speaking role. However, even if the position does not require teaching, much can be gained from requiring a presentation. Assigning a presentation topic allows you to evaluate the candidate's interpretation of the topic, knowledge of a subject area, degree of preparation, insightfulness, innovativeness, and speaking style. If your position requires specialized knowledge or experience, you may consider having candidates present on that specialized area. Innovations in serials management, cataloging issues, Web development, electronic resource management, personnel management, and foreign or international law are all interesting topics.

¶55 Plan adequate time for staff to ask questions following the presentation. This question period will allow the librarians and staff to flesh out the presentation with specific queries. By requiring the candidate to take audience questions, you can evaluate candidates' extemporaneous speaking skills, ability to think on their feet, ability to use humor, and ability to manage reference interview-type interac-

tions when answering questions. Interpersonal style, attitude, and demeanor are other intangibles that may be scrutinized during a candidate's presentation.

### *Dining Out with the Candidate*

¶56 It is a good idea to dine out with your candidates. The opportunity to interact with a candidate in an informal setting is well worth the expense of a meal. Candidates will often open up and disclose far more information during mealtime conversation than during the formal interview. Cues about a candidate's demeanor and interpersonal style are often more accurately assessed during such social interactions. The abilities of candidates to conduct themselves appropriately in a public setting, to treat wait staff and other restaurant employees with respect, and to engage in non-work-related conversation can all be scrutinized during a meal with the candidate. Candidates who are unable to navigate casual dinner conversation may have difficulty in public services or supervising staff. Candidates who are condescending or abusive to wait staff may have communication problems or other traits that are undesirable.

¶57 Remember that part of the goal of an interviewing meal is to impress your candidate. Therefore, you should pick a restaurant that flatters your city or town. Choose a group of staff who will be knowledgeable about your library and who will interact well together. Avoid assembling groups of people embroiled in conflict or other problems. Keep the group small. Large groups make conversation unwieldy. Two to three colleagues plus the candidate is an ideal number. It is appropriate to remind meal attendees that the purpose of the meal is to engage the candidate in conversation.

### *One-on-One vs. Group Interviews*

¶58 Although one-on-one interviews with key personnel are essential, there are many benefits to be gained from requiring candidates to participate in group interviews. Group interviews allow library staff to benefit from hearing responses to the questions posed by their co-workers. Such interviews tend to be more fruitful in addressing a variety of topics, as concerns or queries of numerous employees may surface in a group setting. Also, group interviews allow library staff to witness candidates interacting with a variety of personality types. These interviews can be arranged by department (public services or technical services), by staff level (librarians or paraprofessional staff) or in some other combination. Generally, groups with similar functions or interests work best together. If one person has a tendency to dominate, you may want to formulate a process that will guarantee that everyone gets to ask the candidate a question. Staff who will be participating in the group interviews should be encouraged to prepare questions ahead of time.

### Interview Questions

¶59 Much has been written about the types of questions to be asked during a job interview.<sup>23</sup> Generally, these are of two types: experience-based questions and situational questions. Experience-based questions ask about the past. They query the candidate about any experiences dealing with a particular situation, event, or issue. Situational questions ask about the future. They ask the candidate to discuss how he or she would handle a particular situation, event, or issue if confronted with it. Studies indicate that experience-based questions are more valid and are a better predictor of performance.<sup>24</sup> Thus, you should ask experience-based questions whenever possible.

¶60 Other types of questions are warranted in certain circumstances. Candidates new to the profession may not have a wealth of experience to draw from, necessitating the use of other types of questions. Also, candidates applying for leadership positions should have a vision for their department, a vision for library services, or a vision for the profession of law librarianship. Questions about “vision” that do not inquire about experiences are certainly acceptable in these situations.

¶61 The interviewers should pose only open-ended questions to the candidate.<sup>25</sup> Yes-or-no questions do not encourage the candidate to discuss issues in depth, and they do not facilitate conversational flow. The more the candidates talk, the more you are likely to learn about them. So every effort should be made to keep the candidate talking throughout the interview process. Experts suggest that interviewers use the 80–20 rule.<sup>26</sup> This rule asserts that the candidate should do 80% of

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23. See, e.g., Steven D. Maurer, *A Practitioner-Based Analysis of Interviewer Job Expertise and Scale Format as Contextual Factors in Situational Interviews*, 55 PERSONNEL PSYCHOL. 307 (2002) (discussing, in-depth, situational interviews and considering factors such as context and interviewer expertise); Elaine D. Pulakos & Neal Schmitt, *Experience-Based and Situational Interview Questions: Studies of Validity*, 48 PERSONNEL PSYCHOL. 289 (1995) (discussing how experience-based interview questions tend to be more valid than situational interview questions); Paul J. Taylor & Bruce Small, *Asking Applicants What They Would Do Versus What They Did Do: A Meta-Analytic Comparison of Situational and Past Behaviour Employment Interview Questions*, 75 J. OCCUPATIONAL & ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOL. 277 (2002) (discussing the relative validity of situational versus past-behaviour interview questions).
  24. Pulakos & Schmitt, *supra* note 23, at 306.
  25. See, e.g., WILLIAM FODDY, *CONSTRUCTING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH* 126–52 (1993) (discussing open- versus closed-ended questions and the relative merits of each); see also generally CHARLES L. BRIGGS, *LEARNING HOW TO ASK: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF THE INTERVIEW IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH* (1986) (discussing open-ended interviewing in the context of a far-reaching sociolinguistic examination of interviewing).
  26. See Winnie Grieshaber, *The Pre-Employment Interview*, RADIOLOGY MGMT., July-Aug. 2005, at 20, available at <http://www.ahraonline.org/ConfEd/Education/2005JulyAugust/2005JulyAugust.pdf> (suggesting that, especially in the first few minutes of the interview, candidates should do 80% of the talking); Kenneth R. James, *Ask the Expert: How Can I Find the Right Employees?*, 130 J. AM. DENTAL ASS'N 1101, 1102 (1999) (advising interviewers to listen 80% of the time and to talk only 20% of the time).

the talking and the interviewer should do only 20% of the talking. Open-ended questions help you to do just that.

¶62 The more detail or direction you can provide in your questions the better. Try to formulate questions that will solicit a narrative response by candidates. Questions should encourage candidates to use examples from their own experiences.

¶63 Following are some examples of how to revise poor questions into better ones:

*Weak Question 1:*

Tell me your strengths. (This question fails to provide any direction whatsoever.)

*Better Question 1:*

Describe for me the most significant impact you have had in your current library and explain how you accomplished it. (This question provides direction to talk about the job, and solicits a narrative response.)

*Weak Question 2:*

How patient are you when dealing with demanding patrons? (This question implies a correct response.)

*Better Question 2:*

Tell me how you typically deal with demanding patrons at the reference desk. (This question asks about a specific part of the job and encourages a response that will draw from the candidate's work experience.)

¶64 From the applicant's view, the applicant is interviewing the committee as well. As the employer, be prepared to answer the following questions:<sup>27</sup>

- Why is this position available and how often has it been filled over the last five years?
- What are the current problems faced by this position? What unique opportunities does the position offer?
- What goals would you expect of me in six months? In one year? What is the relationship between the law library and the university? Law school? Law faculty?
- What professional development is offered? Do librarians attend national, regional, and state programs?
- How is one's job performance evaluated? What accounts for success?
- What is the quality of life in the city/community?

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27. For examples of a variety of different questions, see Jennifer S. Murray, *The Zen of Law Librarian Job Interviews: How to Interview for a Job and How to Interview the Job*, 96 LAW LIBR. J. 295, 314–16, 2004 LAW LIBR. J. 19, App'x.

## Making the Job Offer

¶65 You have interviewed your candidates and checked their references. Now it is time to make the decision as to whom to offer the job. Who makes the decision? The manager of the position should have considerable say in the hiring decision; however, both the director of the library and the search committee will also be involved.

¶66 Refer to the job description often in making the final decision. It is important to focus on necessary skills, experience, education, and the intangibles. Of course, you will compare your candidates to your criteria, but more often, you will compare the candidates to each other.

¶67 Some literature suggests one should “go with your gut” in decision making.<sup>28</sup> Another author states that managers make hiring mistakes based on emotional reactions and gut feelings.<sup>29</sup> This author suggests that first impressions and affability should not be more important than competency when making decisions. If employers rely more on instinct than intellect in hiring employees, the proper screening methodology is not in place and employers hire problem employees.

¶68 Other literature urges employers to build a diverse group of librarians who bring a variety of points of view to your library.<sup>30</sup> Diversity in hiring could include race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and persons with physical challenges. Librarians can use proven strategies in recruiting and hiring diverse staff.<sup>31</sup>

¶69 Schedule a meeting with the search committee and discuss the candidates and their positive and negative traits. Set deadlines for decisions. One of the major complaints in academic hiring is the length of time between the candidate interview and the final decision.<sup>32</sup> It is natural to lose good candidates in any hiring process, but if the process drags on, you may lose your top candidate.

¶70 Ideally, the pool will be competitive enough so that if your Candidate #1 does not accept, Candidate #2 is equally acceptable. If the difference is between choosing second best and settling for second best, do not settle for a less-than-ideal candidate.

¶71 Once the offer is made, you need to be ready for negotiations.<sup>33</sup> Managers can negotiate factors other than salary. Be receptive to requests from your candi-

28. For an interesting book on decision making, *see generally* MALCOLM GLADWELL, *BLINK: THE POWER OF THINKING WITHOUT THINKING* (2005).

29. *See* ADLER, *supra* note 3, at 139, 147.

30. *See* Yvonne J. Chandler, *Why Is Diversity Important for Law Librarianship?*, 90 *LAW LIBR. J.* 545 (1998).

31. *See generally* Daryl G. Smith et al., *Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty*, 75 *J. HIGHER EDUC.* 133 (2004).

32. *See* Gregory K. Raschke, *Hiring and Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries: Problems and Solutions*, 3 *PORTAL: LIBR. & ACAD.* 53, 54 (2003) (stating that the typical entry-level position search takes an average of five months).

33. *See* Elizabeth G. Adelman, *The Librarian's Taboo: Negotiating Salaries*, *AALL SPECTRUM*, Sept.-Oct. 2004, at 18 (discussing salary negotiating in law libraries).

date. Since academic titles are usually meaningful in many ways, it would not be wise to accept a request for a title upgrade. You can negotiate other items, however, such as relocation costs, professional library travel, and new computers. Set a deadline for a response to your offer; most candidates can decide within a week.

¶72 Obviously, you must notify the unsuccessful candidates. If you choose not to interview a candidate, you should inform the candidate via either e-mail or regular mail. The timing of this correspondence is debatable. You may choose to correspond at an early stage to inform the candidate that they did not make the list of finalists or you may correspond after you fill the position. If you feel you want to keep viable candidates in the pool until your final decision, wait until you fill the position.

¶73 On the other hand, once you have interviewed a candidate, you should contact the unsuccessful candidates via telephone in a timely fashion. A brief telephone conversation with each unsuccessful candidate will serve a few important purposes. First, a phone call allows the candidate to ask for feedback on their interview, and if asked, you should offer some constructive criticism. A few brief suggestions on how they might improve are all that is necessary. For example, if a candidate asks how staff perceived her, you might answer that her style seemed too heavy-handed or too casual. Most candidates appreciate feedback. Next, a phone call will allow you to solicit feedback on your interview process and interviewing style. Additionally, this final conversation gives you a chance to close the interaction on a positive note. Candidates that you do not hire for one opening may be perfect for a future opening at your library. Closing the interview process in a collegial and professional manner will leave your library looking good to prospective candidates and enhance your reputation as a good employer.

## **Conclusion**

¶74 Every library manager says that hiring great people is their most important task. Although we know the process is important, few have thought through the most effective method to hire the best people. If you want to hire superior people, you need a system that includes reviewing the vacancy, assessing the library's needs, forming an effective search committee, writing a winning job description, advertising far and wide, checking references, conducting a face-to-face interview, and making an offer. Once you find your successful hire, review the process with the hiring team so you can continue to improve the process the next time. Nothing you do will be more important than hiring the right librarian for the right job.