



KEN FAGAN'S  
**INSIDER'S GUIDE**  
**TO FRENCH LAW FIRM PARTNERS**  
**AND ASSOCIATES**

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FRENCH LAW FIRM PARTNERS  
AND ASSOCIATES

QUESTIONS  
ANSWERED  
BY FRENCH  
LAW FIRM  
PARTNERS:

## QUESTION 1:

In your experience as a Partner, what are the most common interview mistakes made by Associates?

## ANSWER 1:

- a) lack (manque) of knowledge of our firm,
- b) lack of legal knowledge, (making factual mistakes about the law),
- c) exaggerations and lies about background,
- d) being arrogant/overconfident,
- e) trying to give the impression that they are knowledgeable about all subjects in the legal field in question,
- f) they hesitate to ask me questions about how my team functions/is organized,
- g) they aren't prepared to speak about how much money they expect to make,
- h) They don't dare (oser) to say 'no' if the Partner gives them an unrealistic deadline,
- i) They don't bring a copy of their CV to the interview,
- j) They don't look the Partner in the eye,
- k) they say 'euh' too often,
- l) They give unclear-excessively diplomatic answers (instead, it is better to "tell me what you really think")

## QUESTION 2:

In your experience as a Partner, what are the most common mistakes made by young lawyers?

## ANSWER 2:

- a) When preparing a memo, they copy and paste work/texts from legal texts/other associates they don't do enough research, rather than making their own analysis,
- b) they don't know how to do legal research,
- c) analysis too long and complicated (the client just wants to know "Can we do this?"/"What are the risks if we do this?"
- d) they work too quickly/they don't take the time to support their analyses/
- e) they hesitate to ask me questions,
- f) they don't re-read their memo enough before showing it to me,

### QUESTION 3:

In your experience as a Partner, what are the most common CV/cover letter (“lettre de motivation”) mistakes by job applicants (“candidats”)?

### ANSWER 3:

- A) exaggerations and lies about background (including their level in English),
- B) unprofessional photo,
- C) spelling mistakes,
- D) They don't personalize the cover letter/email (they send the same “mass” email to many different law firms),
- E) In the CV's “Hobbies/Interests” section they put things that apply to everyone (ex: “I like to travel”), instead of putting something that distinguishes them from other applicants,
- F) Lying about “trous” in their CV,

## QUESTION 4:

You are a female Partner: What career advice would you give to female law students/young female lawyers?

## ANSWER 4:

- A) Work hard to establish your reliability BEFORE you get pregnant and reassure your Partner that you will be just as committed when you come back from maternity leave,
- B) It is definitely possible to have BOTH a career and a family: you just need to be organized and show your Partner that s/he can trust you,
- C) Many female partners think that they need to act like a man, which is not true (“we women have too much self-doubt”) /at the same time, don’t count on receiving any benefits from “gender equality”
- D) Occasionally do something to “spoil yourself”/”Recharge your batteries” (sports, yoga, go to the hairdresser, etc.),
- E) Don’t be afraid to be assertive, especially if it’s something important to you

## QUESTION 5:

In your experience as a Partner, what are the most important characteristics of excellent associates?

## ANSWER 5:

- A) Reliability (including meeting deadlines),
- B) Never give up looking for a solution,
- C) Good legal reasoning/logic (“raisonnement”),
- D) The ability to anticipate the Partner’s and the Client’s needs,
- E) Be curious about the entire file (i.e. look for things that are not obvious but are important),
- F) Able to give the Client a practical, concrete opinion (many associates avoid giving an opinion, due to a lack of self-confidence),
- G) Imagination (finding non-obvious answers)



## QUESTION 6:

Based on your experience as a Partner, what advice would you give to law students today?

## ANSWER 6:

- A) do internships in BOTH law firms and companies (in order to understand how companies work/understand their needs)
- B) Become fluent in English,
- C) Work hard to get into the best possible Master 2 Program,
- D) Don't limit your studies to just Law: study something else, too (Business? English?) [English will help you to work on different files for different clients/Business will help you to understand your client], because nowadays, there is more competition/lawyers have more qualifications,
- E) Start your career in a law firm (not in a company), since  
E1) it's very difficult to start in a company and later go to a law firm (if that's what you want to do) and E2) You will make more money and get more promotions than someone who started as a "juriste",
- F) Do something to distinguish yourself from others (it can be anything!) that shows your endurance/commitment,
- G) Have fun!

## QUESTION 7:

You are a Partner: What is the best way for Associates to prepare for their annual reviews (entretiens annuels)?

## ANSWER 7:

- A) Make 2 lists: list 1 = accomplishments during the year and 2 = things that went less well during the year and why things will be better in the future,
- B) Make a list of any training you would like to take,
- C) Be prepared to speak about a bonus/raise (be prepared to explain why you deserve these),
- D) a common mistake is for the associate to say very little/ nothing during the meeting,
- E) Make 1 or 2 suggestions about how to improve the team's functioning,
- F) Take advantage of this meeting to speak about your career,

## **QUESTION 8:**

You are a Partner: what should an Associate do if s/he makes a mistake when doing work?

## **ANSWER 8:**

Tell the Partner immediately and completely (don't try to resolve the situation yourself!)

## QUESTION 9:

In your experience as a Partner, what are the advantages/disadvantages of a law firm working with a Headhunter (chasseur de tête)?

## ANSWER 9:

Advantages:

A) Saves me time.

Disadvantages:

- A) There is often a big gap between the headhunter's description of the quality of a candidate and the applicant's real quality,
- B) lack of knowledge of our field of law,
- C) they don't always work confidentially,
- D) They don't always take the time to find the right match between the applicant and the law firm/they're in too much of a hurry to "make the sale"

## QUESTION 10:

You are a Partner: what are the qualities/characteristics of a good Partner as a manager of Associates?

## ANSWER 10:

- A) Takes a sincere interest in the associates' well-being,
- B) Doesn't put associates in competition with each other,
- C) Organizes team meals (repas) and events,
- D) Distributes work fairly (in terms of BOTH the quantity and quality of work),
- E) Gives Recognition,
- F) Give your associates autonomy yet be available to them when they need you,
- G) Is demanding yet fair,
- H) To be transparent,

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## QUESTION 1:

You are an Associate: what are the 3 most important things that a law firm could do to convince Associates to stay longer/not move to another law firm?

## ANSWER 1:

- A) Give me recognition,
- B) Pay me well,
- C) Good working environment,
- D) Allow me to have both a professional life and a personal life/be understanding about working hours, especially if I have kids,
- E) Receive a percentage of the fees earned from clients I brought to the law firm,
- F) To have client contact,

## QUESTION 2:

You are an Associate: Identify the 3 most important characteristics of a good Partner to work with.

## ANSWER 2:

- A) Gives recognition,
- B) is good at explaining things and is willing to take the time to explain things,
- C) Empathy/Emotional Intelligence,
- D) Communicate clearly about expectations (“les attentes”),
- E) An expert in our field of the law (so I can respect and learn from this Partner),
- F) Treats me with respect,
- G) Is flexible about holidays/days off (congés),
- H) Give me autonomy but be available when I need you,
- I) Gives me constructive criticism,
- J) Has a clear strategy for the business (and tells me about this strategy),



### QUESTION 3:

When you look for a job and you want to know more about a specific law firm, which questions do you ask your friends/your friends of friends?

### ANSWER 3:

- A) Partner(s) crazy?,
- B) Good working environment/turnover in the team (if turnover is high, why is it high?),
- C) Do they pay well?,
- D) Composition of the team (how many lawyers are there at each level?),
- E) working hours/is there an annual billable hours target?

## QUESTION 4:

You are an Associate: What, concretely, can a Partner do to create and maintain a good working environment in his/her team?

## ANSWER 4:

- A) Create and maintain an environment in which everyone in the team feels free to speak sincerely with/share ideas with all of the other members,
- B) Hire “team players” (people who are not excessively individualistic),
- C) organize recurring external social events,
- D) Not encourage excessive competition among associates,

## QUESTION 5:

What could your current law firm do to make it easier for its Associates to have their own personal clients?

## ANSWER 5:

- A) Be flexible about working hours/lower my annual billable hours target,
- B) Be willing (disposé) to transfer files/clients that are not interesting for the firm to me (so that they can become my personal clients),
- C) My Partner should be available to help me with MY personal clients if I ask,
- D) allow me to meet with my personal clients in the firm's meeting rooms,

## QUESTION 6:

You are an Associate: In your opinion, what are the main advantages/disadvantages of working at a big law firm?

## ANSWER 6:

### ADVANTAGES:

international/challenging/high stakes (des enjeux élevés)  
files to work on,

better paid than small firms,

many resources (access to databases, secretaries/  
assistants, interns, Informatique help, documentary  
specialist,

training budget & resources),

name well-known to most people,

### DISADVANTAGES:

less time to have personal clients,

can be impersonal, (possibly) more pressure,

more hierarchical levels/more bureaucracy,

sometimes in big firms you only work on a “piece of the  
puzzle” (i.e. on only one part of the matter)

## QUESTION 7:

You are an Associate: in your opinion, what are the main advantages/disadvantages of working at a small law firm?

## ANSWER 7:

### ADVANTAGES:

more time for personal clients,

less pressure,

less bureaucracy,

you can often handle a case from beginning to end (not just a “piece of the puzzle”),

### DISADVANTAGES:

not everyone knows the firm,

less well paid,

fewer resources (less access to databases,

fewer secretaries/assistants/interns,

fewer Informatique resources,

