



## Shop Talk: Your Key to Better Interviews

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**Have you ever encountered another BV professional – someone you hadn't met before – while on a break at a conference or a class? You strike up a conversation and 30 to 45 minutes later you wonder where the time went? That rapport, that “chemistry”, happened because you were in “shop-talk” mode.**

You traded real-life information. You got a clear picture of the kinds of engagements the other person does, and the challenges that come with those engagements. You probably even got a glimpse into what you might do if you worked with, or for, that person.

Wouldn't it be great if your job interviews went like this? They can!

### **Laying The Predicate**

In law, “laying the predicate” refers to laying the foundation for evidence or testimony. For example, an expert witness must be shown to be qualified before testimony is accepted. In an interview, you can “lay the predicate” for your questions.

One of the things that made that BV conference conversation so productive is that you asked questions in the context of the subject you were discussing. Without even thinking about it, you were “laying the predicate.”

To better understand how this works, consider two ways to ask what is essentially the same question:

*Would you like to go to a movie?*

OR

*The other day you mentioned a movie you wanted to see. I noticed there's a 7:45 showing at the mall down the street. Would you like to go?*



## Timely Career Tips

Which question will produce the most useful answer? Duh!! That's because it includes a predicate. Here are some contrasting examples in an interview situation:

*What do you want someone to do?*

OR

*I feel like I'm ready to start doing more marketing and business development.  
Would I be able to do much of that in this position?*

(If you really did want to do more marketing and business development, and that opportunity *wasn't* going to be available to you, wouldn't it be nice to know that so you could make a smarter decision?)

*What kind of engagements does your group do?*

OR

*If I were to walk in the door tomorrow, what are the engagements you have that you might put me to work on?*

(The practice may do a lot of engagements that you think would be really fun and challenging. Wouldn't it be helpful to know whether you'll actually be assigned to work on them?)

With enough practice, it's possible to take almost any question and create a predicate that helps drive the conversation into shop-talk. When you do, you'll find that you get information that can help you make a more informed career decision.

### **Answer the Question; Flip the Answer Into A Question**

Anytime you're answering an interviewer's questions, you have a built-in predicate. You can answer the question, then flip your answer into a follow-up question. Example:

**Q:** *How much of your time is spent on X kind of engagement?*

**A:** *Probably about 20% to 25%. How does that compare with what I would find here?*



OR

**Q:** *What kind of business development activity have you been involved in?*

**A:** *I've done some networking with attorneys, written articles and made a couple presentations. What kind of activity has been most successful for you at your practice?*

Sometimes your follow-up question is aimed at eliciting information specific to you and your intended role. Other times, it may have more to do with getting the bigger picture at the firm. In either case, it contributes to more of a real dialogue.

### **The Dual-Option Question**

There may be times when you want to dig more deeply for an understanding of just how this would-be employer handles a certain aspect of an engagement. This is when you can ask the “dual-option question”. For example:

*If I were performing a valuation for a manufacturing company in connection with an outright sale, let's say, I could project cash flows for the next five years, for example, and then calculate the terminal value. On the other hand, I might use an income capitalization approach and collapse expected cash flows over the next economic cycle into one average per se. Which would be your preference?*

By suggesting both options, you make it clear that you know that different people have different preferences. Also, you avoid staking out a position only to discover that your potential employer likes a different one. Lastly, and most importantly, you drive the conversation deeply into shop-talk that will give you a clearer perspective on the person and practice you're thinking about going to work for.

Job interviews can be a tricky situation. In your effort to make the best possible impression you can end up failing to dig as deeply as you should or, worse yet, making inaccurate assumptions from the little information you do get.

Shop-talk can be your way to get the real-life information you need to make an informed career decision.