



Yoni Levy



Jeremiah Williams



Jenny Rikoski



Peter Erichsen



Matthew Richards



Chrystal LaRoche

**Yoni Levy:** Welcome to a special bonus episode of *Scope of Practice*, a podcast that typically opens the window for an inside look at different practice groups and the lives of attorneys in those groups here at Ropes & Gray. I'm Yoni Levy, an associate in Boston. And today, we have a special feature episode: on-campus interviews (OCI). The remarkable whirlwind dance of law firms hiring bright, aspiring young minds from law school is just around the corner, and we thought it would be a great opportunity to take a pause from our regular focus and have a chat to give an inside view in respect of on-campus interviews. On this episode, I'm pleased to be joined by one of our on-campus interviewers, Chrystal LaRoche, who's a counsel in our real estate group based in New York. But before we get into our deeper conversation with Chrystal, why don't we hear some quick tips and tricks for interviewing from our hiring partners across our offices.

**Jeremiah Williams:** Hi, I'm Jeremiah Williams, a partner in the litigation & enforcement group in the Washington, D.C. office

of Ropes & Gray. My interview tip for candidates is to really take your time and research the firm before you interview. There are two reasons to do this. One, it shows the law firm that you're really interested in them. Second, it helps you ask more specifically tailored questions that are going to be better at enabling you to determine whether the law firm is a good fit for you.

**Jenny Rikoski:** Hi, I'm Jenny Rikoski, a partner in the Boston office of Ropes & Gray. I would encourage law students to come prepared with questions—not just general ones about training, mentoring and how assignments are allocated, but questions that will help you get a better sense of whether a particular firm might be the right place for you to practice. Firms are really different, and asking good questions is the best way to learn whether a firm has the right elements for you to thrive. Your thoughtful questions will also give your interviewers more insight into you and what makes you tick.

**Peter Erichsen:** I'm Peter Erichsen, and I'm Ropes & Gray's hiring partner. I believe there are many different ways to succeed at Ropes & Gray, and for that reason, I believe there are many different ways to interview with us successfully. But if I had to name one thing I look for when talking with law students, it would be enthusiasm—enthusiasm for our work; enthusiasm for working in teams. I like to say that there are no prerequisites for Ropes & Gray—you don't need to know business, finance or whatever—we supply everything, but we can't supply the enthusiasm that we hope our recruits will bring with them.

**Matthew Richards:** Hi, it's Matt Richards. I'm a partner in the private capital transactions group in the Chicago office, and I also serve as one of the office hiring partners for Chicago. I'd say it's always appreciated when you send just a little note to the people you interview with, and I think the best thing you can do is send as much of a personalized note as you can. Pick up on maybe a little personal anecdote you discussed with your interviewer, or a particular practice group interest or something like that—something to make the note just a little bit more personal than a form note. Just going that little

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extra step I think will be really appreciated, and distinguish your interview from, frankly, a lot of interviews that someone might have had that day or that week. And while it takes just a little bit of extra time, the little bit of extra effort can be worth it. Thanks, and good luck.

**Yoni Levy:** Great, hopefully you enjoyed hearing those tricks and tips from a variety of hiring partners across our U.S. offices. Now, stick around for a deeper dive discussion with Chrystal LaRoche. Hi, Chrystal—thanks for joining me.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** Hi, Yoni. It’s a pleasure to be here.

**Yoni Levy:** Why don’t we jump right into what I think people want to know the most, which is when you’re doing interviews, what are you looking for in a candidate? What makes someone stand out in your eyes?

**Chrystal LaRoche:** A few of the things that I look for first is poise and presence. And then as far as responses to questions, I’m looking for thoughtfulness, intelligence, and honestly that you took the time to know something about the firm, that you don’t come in thinking that we are exclusively a bankruptcy-centered firm because that’s not what we do, or thinking that we only have offices in Boston because that’s also not accurate. So, I need to know that you know a little bit about where you’re interviewing and why. I would say that it really comes across well when I, as an interviewer, have a candidate who is genuinely interested in Ropes, who genuinely shows that they have not only done bare level research, but they are similarly committed to *pro bono* work or they saw Ropes at an on-campus event and noticed that we have a commitment to diversity, based on information that they got from people who worked at the firm or information that they saw on a website. Anything to let your interviewer know that you are genuinely interviewing at Ropes & Gray or whatever firm you’re interviewing at, as opposed to just another firm to check a box and fill an interview slot—I think that is just a good best practice to have when doing an on-campus interview.

**Yoni Levy:** I totally agree. I think you’ll get more out of each of your interviews if you’re prepared for them and you have a

reason why you want to do that interview than you will with a scattershot approach of just interviewing at as many places as possible but not really being prepared. I think a lot of that’s for the reason that you said, that we want to see that you’re interested. And a lot of that is because of what it’s like to be an interviewer, which is you’re going through a lot of people in one day, talking to a lot of them, and you’re just looking for things that stick out that you can remember that made an impression on you. I think some of the things that we’re looking for are things we touched on earlier, which are, “Do I get along with you? Do you seem like you’re put together (like you’re smart)?” All of that good stuff, but also just want to know that you’re actually interested in Ropes & Gray, you’re actually interested in the firm you’re interviewing with, and to some degree that you’re interested in the office you’re looking at, that you’re targeting, especially when you’re seeing so many people in one day. Maybe you can talk a little bit about what impresses you the most at an interview.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** I am always impressed with people who have answers that do not sound rehearsed but do sound polished, and that is a difficult thing to do, to achieve. But I would say it is critical if you can do it—if you can have answers that are polished without sounding perfected, without sounding rehearsed and canned, then you will have a good interview. And as long as you are your authentic self and you are not trying to fit into the box that you think the interviewer is looking for, I think you’ll have a good interview. And if you are wrong, then that’s 20 minutes out of your life that you can never get back, and 20 minutes of the interviewer’s life that they can never get back. So, be authentic, ask good questions, and answer in an authentic, real way that you may practice, but shouldn’t sound canned. I hope that was helpful.

**Yoni Levy:** Thanks, Chrystal—that’s helpful. Some of the game here is just finding the right environment that’ll be best suited for you to excel. Different work places have different approaches and feels, and you want to find a place that’ll be well suited for you to excel personally and professionally, and that’s what we’re looking for on our side of the table,

too. You're working long hours with people at a law firm on difficult, tense projects that are challenging, and we want to see that you're the kind of person who will excel under the environment that we've created here at the firm, and who can work with us to get through challenging situations. I think you mentioned, Chrystal, some points about knowing about the firm, so I think it's a good opportunity to talk a little bit about the kinds of things you can do to prepare for an interview. I think you can do lots of research on the firm and try to get to know the work that it does as you mentioned. Do you have suggestions on how people can get to know more about firms generally?

**Chrystal LaRoche:** More about firms generally, I think Google is your friend. You can always go onto the internet and look up a firm. You can look it up both on their website as well as in legal periodicals that come out because people from firms often write articles. We are active in the legal community, and I think many firms, particularly the ones that are conducting on-campus interviews, are active in the legal community. They will often also host events at the schools, and so show up at those events and meet people because the only way to get to know a firm beyond what's available on the internet and through a web search is to actually come in contact with the people who work there. And outside of the interview process, there are often opportunities to do that at events, receptions, panels, and webinars so that you can see how the people at a firm engage with others, both publicly and privately.

**Yoni Levy:** I think those were some great points. I've plugged multiple times on this podcast before that [ropesgrayrecruiting.com](http://ropesgrayrecruiting.com) is a great place to learn about Ropes & Gray, in addition to our [general website](#). It's more focused on the recruiting aspect of it. But I totally agree, going to events to meet people and get to know them is helpful for that background information on what the firm does and what kind of environment it provides. What's the feel that you get from the people who you talk to? Are they sharp? Do they seem harsh? Do they seem relaxed? In general, does it seem like they create an environment that will be best suited for you to not only succeed, but thrive personally and professionally? And on top of that, one of the easiest ways to make an interpersonal connection with the person interviewing you or any of the people you meet in the interview process is to talk about other people that you know at the firm. People love to

play geography and know people whom you know, and you know people that they know. An easy way to do that is to go to events and start meeting people, and just start networking. I think it could be easy to fall back on these on-campus interviews as an opportunity to just saunter your way through the interview season without having to do any of the legwork. But I think the legwork really pays off, both for yourself, in terms of getting to know people, but also in terms of making connections that you can reference in your interview to show that you're interested in the firm, reference in your interview to try and make a personal connection with the person you're interviewing with, and get a sense also of do people in the firm know each other. If you've met 30 people and you mention them, and the person you're talking to hasn't met a single one of them, that could be a sign also. There's lots of information that can be gained from going to even these casual events at a bar or a mixer at your law school.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** One thing I wanted to add to that also is that talking to students who have summered at the firm that you're considering interviewing with is another good way to learn about it and to get some uncensored feedback, because it will give you a sense of whether they had an enjoyable experience, an unenjoyable experience, whether they generally felt integrated or that the firm was taking steps to attempt to integrate them into the practice and give them a view of what life is like as an associate at the applicable law firm. So, I would say talking to people at your school who have summered or interned at the law firm that you're interviewing with is another way to get to know the firm.

**Yoni Levy:** I think that's a great idea. Just circling back to the website for a minute, I just wanted to say also, I know it can be hard maybe to sort through a website—there's lots of them, every firm has at least one website with lots of information on it—but I think the key to that is trying to focus in on what are the things that the firm you're looking at is proudest of. What are the things that appear on the front page? What are the rankings that they tout? Ropes, for most of my career has been focused on what our diversity rankings are—it shows that diversity is very important to us. We've been focused on the fact that we're always ranked in the top firms for best places to work in terms of associate happiness—that was a big factor for me, and a big sign for me that that's something that the firm values. Other firms

might tout different things that they're the proudest of, and that's a sign for the alignment of the values of the firm. What are the things that the firm is proudest of that you can mention when someone asks you why you're interested in that firm?

I think the other piece to preparing for an interview (and, Chrystal, curious for your take on this too) is, not only to research the firm, but research yourself a little bit. Read through your resume, make sure you know everything on it, and make sure you have something to say about anything that's on your resume. When you're doing these interviews, sometimes all you have is the resume, sometimes you have a resume and a transcript, but that might be the only thing you have to go on and you don't ever really know what someone's going to pick on, and so be prepared to talk about any of those.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** Yes, I would agree that you should be prepared to talk about anything on your resume—if you put it there, it's because you did it. The other thing I would say is have someone else read your resume, preferably a lawyer or a law student, a 3L maybe. Have someone read it and ask them what jumps out at them. Because I have read resumes of people who their resume looks like they are for sure going into litigation—that's all they could possibly be interested in because they majored in political science in undergrad, they did an internship with a professor that was in a courtroom, they are clerking for a justice their first year, and it just looks a lot like this person wants to be in litigation. And then you talk to them and they say, "No, I want to do international copyright law," and you're like, "Well, how would anyone ever know that?" So, make sure that there's something on your resume, or that you at least have a story or an explanation, for how your resume matches up with your interests or how it doesn't—how your experience may be in one thing, but you're really interested in something else, and that interest came about because of X or Y. Be able to explain any discrepancies or apparent discrepancies based on what's on your resume.

**Yoni Levy:** I think that's great advice. And also, just remind yourself quickly on any papers or things that you've listed in your resume. You just don't know what people are going to ask about and it might just happen to be that the person you're interviewing with was also a philosophy major or has a masters in philosophy and wants to talk to you about

your philosophy Ph.D. And so, it's just good to make sure that you're sharp on all of your own stories. In particular (I think Chrystal alluded to this at the end there in explaining her story), I think one of the hardest things to do can be to develop your answer to "Tell me about yourself or tell me what you're interested in." So, I wonder if you have any tips, Chrystal, on how to approach that general question where people are asking you, "Tell me about yourself?"

**Chrystal LaRoche:** You're going to think this is odd advice, but I would say to tell the person to have an answer for that, have a particular story, have it be about 45 seconds to a minute long, and then ask the question of your interviewer because that will let the interviewer know that you are interested in them as well. These on-campus interviews, much like callback interviews and interviews just in general, are conversations at the end of the day. It should flow, so I would say be able to speak to yourself and have three points that you want to get across about yourself in a story format, and then turn that question on your interviewer and ask them about themselves. Ask them about their practice. Ask them about something that they're working on. You don't have to wait for the end of the interview when the interviewer asks you, "Do you have any questions for me?" The on-campus interview is the gating interview, so you want to get information out, but you also want to glean information yourself.

**Yoni Levy:** I totally agree—I think that was a great point about turning the question around. You automatically feel like you've made a good connection with someone when you had a good conversation and the conversation just flowed. And human beings like to talk about themselves generally, so I think it's just never a bad idea to ask your interviewer about themselves—it will make them feel more engaged in the conversation. I think that brings us to another important part of this process overall, which is trying to understand for a moment, even though of course you're consumed with your desire to make a good impression, to get a good job, to get the job you want, but trying to understand for a second and imagine what it's like to be the interviewer.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** We, as interviewers, are doing a ton of interviews in a row with maybe five minutes in between, and maybe not, because often interviews, the good ones, run over by a minute. And if they run over, then you only have

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—Chrystal LaRoche, Counsel

three minutes to jot down notes and then get ready for the next candidate. It is an exhausting process. So, take that into account, particularly if you are towards the end of the day—understand that you may’ve had two or three interviews that day, but your interviewer has probably done more like 20. At the end of the day, we are very tired, so take that into account. Know that we are people too, and just having a bit of empathy, showing that bit of empathy, will go a long way in being memorable to your interviewer as well as engendering good will just overall.

**Yoni Levy:** I totally agree. I always appreciate when people give a nod to that and say, “Must be a long day for you,” or towards the end of an interview say something like, “I know you probably have 12 of these lined up so I don’t want to take too much of your time, but here’s one question.” I always really appreciate it, and I think it shows that you’re thoughtful, that you’re genuinely interested in how things are going for your interviewer, and it just helps make a connection and have something to discuss. Speaking of which, that comment at the end where you don’t want to take up too much time with questions, what do you think about asking questions of your interviewer as the interviewee? Are there specific questions you like to hear, or questions you would avoid? Any suggestions there?

**Chrystal LaRoche:** Questions I like to hear and questions that I asked, even though it was a long time ago but I remember asking, are questions about the practice of the person that you’re being interviewed by, something interesting and engaging that they’re working on currently. What’s their favorite part about being a lawyer at fill-in-the-blank firm (so, at Ropes & Gray)? What’s their least favorite thing about practicing law? What has kept them engaged for as long as they have been? How did you become a fill-in-the-blank lawyer? Did you always know you wanted to be in private equity? Did you always know you wanted to be a finance lawyer since you decided to go into the law? Questions like that are generally very well received because they give an opportunity for the interviewer to speak about themselves

and about what they do on a daily basis.

**Yoni Levy:** I totally agree. I think be careful not to ask questions that you could easily find the answer to on a firm’s website, both because it might reflect that you haven’t done enough research, but also because you want to avoid questions that it seems like people are just going to get asked over and over again that have no real value but that you’re just asking for the sake of asking a question. I would say, along the lines of what Chrystal said, to the extent you can find out in advance who your interviewers are, looking them up and knowing something about them and tailoring your question to that person will go a long way, both in terms of making a connection with them and in terms of getting you real information. If you find you’re being interviewed by someone who lateraled to that firm from another firm, asking them, “I saw that you lateraled into Ropes & Gray. I saw that you lateraled from X, Y, Z firm. What motivated that? Why did you pick this as your second firm?” Or, “I saw your practice group goes across two different areas of law. Which one of those is more interesting and why?” Something that will show both that you’re thoughtful and did your research, but also make a connection and also give you a really more genuine answer than the other questions.

I think one thing to keep in mind when asking questions and when answering questions (which I understand can be difficult to balance with the desire to be genuine), is to be authentic and genuine, but keep in mind that everything you say reflects on yourself. Questions that you answer that don’t seem like they’re necessarily being asked for assessment purposes, but might just sound like fun conversation, I assure you that whatever your answer is will somehow reflect on who you are. As an example, I ask a lot in interviews, “What’s your favorite class in law school? What’s your least favorite class in law school?” And then I follow up with questions. If you say you’re least favorite class is contracts and I ask you why, the answer should not be, “Because contracts is hard and I didn’t do well on it.” There has to be some logical reason where, “I didn’t connect well with the way the professor did

X, Y, Z,” or, “The subject matter doesn’t speak to me because of such and such.” I think I tend to get those genuine answers because I say it in a very conversational way, where it just sounds like I’m opening up and getting to know you, which I am, but your answer reflects on you.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** I would add to that: Every question reflects on you. The answer to every question that we ask is a reflection and an assessment tool for us. One of my favorite questions to ask is, “Tell me something about yourself that I couldn’t learn by reading your resume and/or cover letter. And I ask that question for a very specific reason—I have several degrees in psychology in addition to my J.D., and the way people answer that question really tells me a lot about them. So, when people go way off script and start telling me about how they really would always rather be hiking in the Adirondacks or something, it tells me something about their commitment to practicing law in the foreseeable future, as opposed to telling me, “What you can’t necessarily tell from my resume is that I’m a first generation law student and I had to do X, Y, Z to get here. And I’m so thrilled that I have this opportunity and I’m looking so forward to practicing in X city.” Or, “You might not be able to tell that I really enjoy bringing people together and I like teamwork.” Those types of answers speak volumes to me about the type of person you are and your commitment to the law, but also your commitment to the interview process, frankly, so just be careful how you answer those open-ended friendly questions.

**Yoni Levy:** Let’s say you’ve gotten through the interview process and you’re back home. How do you feel generally about people following up with you after the interview?

**Chrystal LaRoche:** I am a fan. I am old-school, and I just think it’s lovely when someone sends me a thank you or “It was a pleasure to meet with you.” You don’t have to send me a card in the mail, but an email just saying, “It was really

nice to talk to you and learn more about your practice. I appreciated you taking the time.” I like that. I may not always have an opportunity to respond, but I do like it. And I don’t think anyone is upset or offended at receiving a thank you, particularly by email.

**Yoni Levy:** Totally agree, and I think to the extent you can help your interviewer draw the connection between which one of your interviews that you were and your email, I think all the better. So, if you can reference, “I really enjoyed talking to you about that Monet painting that you love,” or whatever—something unique that came up in your interview, in my eyes that’s even better because then I instantly remember, “That was this person that I talked to about that. Loved that person—thought they were great.” A lot of times in the back of my head I’ll say, “Loved them—they were great. My only concern is I’m not sure how interested they are in Ropes.” And that email helps assuage that concern because you took the time to follow up with me.

**Chrystal LaRoche:** 100%. I agree 100% with that.

**Yoni Levy:** Great—thank you, Chrystal, for joining us today and sharing your insights and tips on acing on-campus interviews. It’s really been a great pleasure talking, and I’m sure our listeners learned a lot too. We hope you found this to be a helpful, insightful episode. If there’s a specific topic you’d like us to cover in a future episode, be it our normal episodes or a special feature like this episode, please reach out to me directly—I’d love to hear from you. If you’re a law student or recent graduate who’d like to learn more, please visit our website at [www.ropesgrayrecruiting.com](http://www.ropesgrayrecruiting.com) or check us out on Instagram at [@ropesgray](https://www.instagram.com/ropesgray). You can subscribe to this series wherever you typically listen to podcasts, including on [Apple](#), [Google](#) and [Spotify](#). Please look out for future episodes and share with your friends. Thanks again for listening and see you on the next episode.

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