

ASK A DIRECTOR

Successful Hiring

Question: What are the most important qualities and skills that you look for during the hiring process?



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There are a number of qualities that I seek in any position within the library. These aren't always easy to define, but I will try to articulate four of them. The first I would describe as attitudinal, which I think of as a willingness and flexibility. When presented with a new type of project, the employee's first reaction is a willingness, or rather an eagerness, to take on new projects—the opposite of resistance. In our library environment, the flow and type of questions and projects are unpredictable and ever-changing. One may be asked to teach a session on an unfamiliar topic, to learn a new technology, to create a new procedure, to adapt to a new set of conditions or constraints, to research a complex question, or to take on a new set of duties. In order to be successful at any of these, a person must first embrace the challenge.

The second quality I look for in a candidate is a positive disposition, with a general desire to please and to be a valued part of a team. Libraries are a service-oriented business, and all of our services are the product of a cooperative effort. The desire to please gives an employee an incentive to go the extra mile for our customers. It's not sufficient, however, to want to please our customers. It's also important to want to work in harmony with your co-workers and to be sensitive to their needs, which translates into supporting

your colleagues, pitching in where needed, and giving appropriate credit to others.

The third quality I like to see in a candidate is initiative. I love when an employee, at any level, takes the initiative in formulating an idea for a service or a new operating procedure and seeing that project through to completion. No director can see all that needs to be done, originate every idea, or micromanage every aspect of a project. Having employees who take the initiative is essential to

continuous improvement in library services. Employees are also happier in experiencing the support and trust that comes with taking initiative.

The fourth quality I seek is competence. I think of this as a set of skills and knowledge that can be used effectively to achieve the necessary ends in an efficient manner. Here, I look for whether or not the candidate has the sufficient background, intelligence, and conscientiousness to do the job to our expectations. ■



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With 50-plus research staff across multiple offices in Europe, Asia, and around the U.S., the services that we are able to offer at Latham & Watkins LLP depend on the staff we hire. Our motto—working locally, thinking globally—enables us to strategically use our research staff. With more than 2,000-plus attorneys across 33 offices worldwide, we receive research requests 24/7. Each research librarian frequently interacts with attorneys both inside and outside of their local office.

Proven customer service skills are essential qualities, and include the ability to collaborate with other business service functions, the ability to triage competing deadlines, and the willingness to assist other research staff in other offices to get the job done.

Questions to ask a candidate include: How do you package and deliver research findings to your customers? Do you simply attach the results and leave your customer to wade through them? A good candidate understands the importance of presenting, in a quick, digestible format, a summary of the research results.

With a wide array of internal and external databases, our challenge is to raise awareness of the services and

know-how tools that are available via our platform. A successful candidate will have the ability to use a variety of approaches: point-of-need training, new attorney orientations, presentations at practice department meetings, and other instruction both inside and outside of the physical library space. Today's research librarians must be proactive with outreach, effective speakers, and competent in the use of technology to design programs that will be successful with various audiences.

Additional questions to ask the candidate include: Are you curious about new research platforms? How do you keep your research skills fresh? How have you applied what you have

learned to improve an existing procedure? Are you willing to try a new approach even with a risk of failure? With the rapid pace of change, today's research librarians must be professionally agile and resilient.

Each of these factors is important to consider during the hiring process. As the use of electronic resources and technological capabilities continue to expand, the need for a physical library space will continue to decrease. As we anticipate continued change and the expansion of services beyond hiring those with excellent research and instructional skills, we look to hire research librarians who are collaborative, curious, and agile.