‘Get it, get us, get me … then you get the job’

Q: I am a second year law student and needless to say, entry lawyer positions are few and far between. After listing my education (top third of class but not law review) and my job qualifications on my resume, can you suggest any other ways to distinguish myself?

A: When people are looking to hire someone they are asking themselves inside:

“Do you get it?”
What is your awareness of our situation. Have you figured out what incredible opportunities we want to seize, what risks we’re trying to avoid? Have you done a SWOT analysis on our firm by checking out our website, news, clients we’ve worked with, interviews with our Managing and other Partners and determining what our Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats are? Do you get our clients? Have you checked us out on the street?

“Do you get us?”
Do you get our culture? Do you get what personalities do well here and which don’t? Do you get what is important to us and what isn’t?

“Do you get me?”
Most law partners consciously or unconsciously are looking for the following capabilities:
• What work can you get done for me? “This is different than what can you do for me. When I work with an entry level lawyer I want them to get stuff done for me.”
• What’s the quality of your work? “The less I have to check out stuff that my name goes on, especially for spelling, grammar and just plain lousy prose, the more that lightens my load. And right now my load is overwhelming me.”
• How quick a study are you? “The quicker and more accurately you can get what I want and deliver that, the more I can get done and the more you are a help to me. The more I have to explain things to you and even worse…repeat things to you, the more quickly I get frustrated and bogged down.”
• How quickly can you get work done for me? “Rightly or wrongly, when I assign you something, I probably need it yesterday. Any delay agitates me, any excuses or explanations are like ‘nails on a chalkboard.”

Q&A

• How easy are you to get along with?
  “Every law firm has enough high-maintenance (i.e. easy to upset, difficult to please) people and jerks. We don’t need another one.”
• How tough are you? “The law, clients, schedules, partners, associates, staff and billable hours are tough. It ain’t personal, but I can’t stand people who whine, complain, blame, make excuses and worst of all cry too easily. The law, clients, schedules, opposing counsel, partners, associates, staff not to mention the God Almighty ‘billable hours’ are tough and rough. If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen and the profession.”
• Can you eventually bring in business? “I care more about your helping me get my work done, but I will tell you, if in spite of our riding you hard, you don’t figure out how to bring in new business, you will always be treated as less important than those who can. If you want to be judged only on your competence, that will only get you so far. Have a big enough book of business that you can take anywhere (although that doesn’t justify becoming an arrogant SOB). That’s leverage. You don’t like that reality? That should make you get of the kitchen too.

Now here is how to use the above. After you’ve been interviewed by people or a team and they ask you if you have any questions, say that you have a hypothetical question if they wouldn’t mind your asking.

In all likelihood, they’ll be impatient and annoyed, but give you 30 seconds to ask your question out of politeness.

When they do, say: “I’d like you to imagine it’s a year from now and partners are reviewing decisions they made this year and when it comes to the person you hire for the spot you’re interviewing me for, they look at each other and say, ‘Best new lawyer in years. Let’s find three more like that!’ Tell me about what that new lawyer does that would make them say that.”

If they pause — which in all likelihood they will — say, “Would you mind if I take a chance at answering that if I were you?”

Chances are they will be a little disarm, curious, intrigued and like your boldness. And then when they tell you to go ahead, go into your answers from the above questions.

If I was one of them, all your qualifications were fine and you could answer those questions I would think: ‘You get it, you get us, you get me … you get the job.”