

The hustings

The hustings for the post of deputy vice president of the Law Society reminds **Richard Barr** of past interview experiences of his own



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They sat in a row before us, looking anxious. All were about to face the job interview to end all interviews before a panel of 75 or more solicitors – and all were applying for the same job.

We have all been there. It is a long time since being a solicitor was a job for life. There is more mobility within the legal profession than there ever has been before. Most job interviews now are a far cry from my first. That was a time when all aspiring members of the solicitors' profession were vetted before they could enter into articles (the predecessor of training contracts).

The acne had scarcely faded from my face when I presented myself uncomfortably in an ill-fitting suit. The panel of three elderly solicitors could easily have passed as characters in a Dickens novel. They gave me wrinkled smiles as they looked down on me with expressions of faint disapproval.

The interview began with the

oldest member of the panel asking me in a falsetto voice: 'Tell me, Barr,' he whistled through what was left of his teeth, 'is your father the cricketer?'

I gulped. I had no idea, but I thought my father might have played a little village cricket.

'Yes,' I said brightly, hoping this was not a trick question that was going to get me into real trouble. I was certainly no cricketer and would not have known (and still don't) the difference between a leg break and a silly mid-on even if it hit me on the nose. Indeed, that is how my cricketing career began and ended, when a well-aimed ball caused my nose to bleed for a week.

But to my surprise there were no further questions. There was some muttering about 'coming from good stock' and all of a sudden the interview was over and another legal career was launched onto an unsuspecting world.

At the other end of my career, I had a much more difficult interview when I applied to become the voluntary legal adviser to a small charity a couple of years ago. For some reason there was stiff competition for this unpaid post.

In preparation I took my suit to the cleaners, had a haircut, researched everything I could about the charity, polished up my CV, and set off for a posh office in the City of London. I arrived 45 minutes early (unusual for me – I am the kind of person who arrives on the railway platform just as the last

door is being slammed shut).

While I was waiting, I tried to look calm in the deep leather armchairs, though I had sunk in so low that I wondered if I would be able to get up when I was called. Then I noticed that one of my highly polished shoes had a mark on it. Should I sacrifice my handkerchief and clean it? Probably not. What if I needed to blow my nose?

The moment came. The interview panel was sitting around a large table. Like sniper fire, the questions came from all directions. Yet, they were friendly. I felt it was going well. Then, part way through, I noticed that the purple laundry label was still prominently attached to my suit jacket with a safety pin. I tried to conceal it but I am sure it was noticed. Ah well, at least they will have known that I was wearing a clean suit. I made them laugh from time to time (perhaps a mistake) and it was over in an hour.

A few days later, the chairman rang me to say that the standard of applicants was exceptionally high and that I was indeed the funniest applicant but... the rest is a small and insignificant piece of history.

Law Society candidates

The three before us were applying for an infinitely more important position.

Each year, at about this time, the Law Society appoints a deputy vice president (DVP – the Law Society loves acronyms), who, all being well, will a year

later become the vice president, and then, after another 12 months, be the head honcho of all solicitors in England and Wales. Would-be DVPs have, as part of the process, to submit to a form of hustings and face the full might of the members of the Council of the Law Society.

Each candidate in turn had to answer every question, ranging from 'There are three candidates for the position. Why are you better suited than the other two, and what qualities do you have that will convince the profession that you can lead us in the undoubtedly difficult days ahead?' to 'What do the candidates consider is the most urgent action the Law Society should take to increase its relevance to individual members of the profession ahead of a possible withdrawal of section 51 funding?'

Under the avuncular chairmanship of past president Nick Fluck, the hustings took place in a good-natured atmosphere, with each candidate giving as good as he (and two shes) got. We will not know for a few weeks who will take up the mantle, as the final decision is made through a secret ballot.

However, I do have to report a serious defect in the whole process, which I do hope will be remedied in future years: not one of the candidates was asked about their cricketing skills. I may therefore have to declare the whole process a no ball or even a very silly mid-off. **SJ**