10 QUESTIONS TO ASKBEFORE YOU START ANY WORK ASSIGNMENT

What Partners Wish You Would Ask Upfront

A partner drops by your desk: *'Can you review the disclosure schedules and flag any issues by EOD*?' You nod confidently. Then they leave, and panic sets in. What kind of issues? How detailed? What format? Asking seems stupid; but guessing wastes everyone's time

Here's the truth: Partners would rather answer questions upfront than fix the work that missed the mark. These 10 questions will save you hours of wasted effort and demonstrate your strategic thinking

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE & CONTEXT

1. Who are we representing - the buyer or the seller?

Why it matters: Your lens changes completely. As buyer's counsel, you're scrutinizing for gaps and risks. As seller's counsel, you're ensuring disclosures are adequate to avoid any future breaches

2. Are there any specific issues I should concentrate on?

Why it matters: The partner may already know certain areas are problematic or particularly important to the client. There is no point in wasting time on liability issues that have already been discussed with the client

3. Is there anything that I should know about the client or the counterparty that affects my approach?

Why it matters: A first-time founder selling their business needs different handling than a serial entrepreneur. A strategic buyer has different concerns than a financial buyer

FINDING THE RIGHT RESOURCES

4. If I need context about the deal, who should I reach out to in the team?

Why it matters: There is no point reinventing the wheel. Know who has the commercial terms, who ran the due diligence, and who is handling tax issues

5. Is there a precedent, base draft, or a template I should reference?

Why it matters: Firms have preferences and standards. Starting from the right precedent saves time and ensures consistency

6. Where can I find the warranty schedule to compare the disclosures against?

Why it matters: Disclosures must respond to specific warranties. Without the warranty schedule, you're working blind

CLARIFYING DELIVERABLES

7. What should be the format of the deliverable?

Why it matters: Does the partner want a quick email summary, a detailed memo, a marked-up document, or bullet points for a client call? Format shapes your entire approach

8. What level of detail are you looking for?

Why it matters: First-pass high-level review vs. detailed line-by-line analysis requires very different time and effort. It is better to clarify expectations up front

MANAGING WORKFLOW

9. I have another assignment from Partner X also due by EOD - which should I prioritize?

Why it matters: Partners don't always know what else is on your plate. Asking forces them to help you prioritize rather than you guessing wrong and disappointing someone

10. Is there anyone else I should loop in or coordinate with?

Why it matters: Maybe another associate is working on related schedules, or a senior associate should review before it goes to the partner. Coordination prevents duplication and gaps

THE BOTTOM LINE

The associates who advance aren't the ones who never ask questions - they're the ones who ask the **RIGHT questions** at the **RIGHT time**. These questions show you're thinking about quality, efficiency, and the bigger picture. That's what partners notice

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