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Recruiting Letters

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Recruiting Letters

D. Robert White

Abstract

Every recruiting letter has one of three basic messages: (1) yes; (2) maybe; (3) no.

D. Robert White*

Every recruiting letter has one of three basic messages: (1) yes; (2) maybe; (3) no. If the letter you get says "no," you don't care what else it might say. But if it says "maybe" or "yes," it's important for you to be able to read between the lines in order to know where you really stand. To aid you in this process, set forth on the following pages are two pairs of recruiting letters. In each pair, one letter shows you what the firm said, the other what the firm really meant.

* © 1983 Daniel White. Excerpt from THE OFFICIAL LAWYER'S HANDBOOK (1983).
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THE "YES" LETTER

What the firm said:

Queen & Sprawling

1 Peachtree Street

Atlanta, Georgia 30319

November 23, 1993

Mr. James T. Pinch
906 Johnson Hall
Columbia Law School
New York, NY 11743

Dear Mr. Pinch:

I enjoyed talking with you when I was at Columbia. You have an excellent record, and on behalf of the firm I would like to extend you an offer of employment.

We would be pleased to have you visit our offices to meet more of our attorneys. If you would be interested in pursuing this invitation, please call me or our recruitment coordinator Ellen Shady to arrange a mutually convenient time for your visit.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Bookman

What the firm *meant*:

Queen & Sprawling

1 Peachtree Street

Atlanta, Georgia 30319

November 23, 1993

Mr. James T. Pinch
906 Johnson Hall
Columbia Law School
New York, NY 11743

Dear Mr. Pinch:

For a guy from a trade school in Harlem, you make quite an impression. Your pale complexion and emaciated physique, combined with your incredibly high grade point average, suggest that you are precisely the sort of compulsive, library-loving grunt we're looking for.

No doubt you will have a lot of offers, because hard-core zealots like you aren't a dime-a-dozen. Someone so patently willing to sacrifice his health and social life is a real find.

I wouldn't want to introduce you to a client or have to eat a meal with you, but I'll bet you could rack up enough billable hours in a year to reduce your salary to the equivalent of \$1.95 per hour.

I hope we can sign you up.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Bookman

THE "MAYBE" LETTER

What the firm said:

Craven, Swine & Less
 43 Park Avenue
 New York, New York 30319

November 23, 1983

Mr. Russell A. Williams
 413 Johnson Hall
 Columbia Law School
 New York, NY 11743

Dear Mr. Williams:

I enjoyed talking with you when I was at Columbia. You have an excellent record, and although I am not able to make you an offer of employment based on our meeting, I would like very much to have you visit our offices for further interviews.

If you would be interested in pursuing this invitation, please call our recruitment coordinator Laurie Munch to arrange a mutually convenient time for your visit.

I look forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

D. Carter Covington

What the firm *meant*:

Craven, Swine & Less
43 Park Avenue
New York, New York 30319

November 23, 1983

Mr. Russell A. Williams
413 Johnson Hall
Columbia Law School
New York, NY 11743

Dear Mr. Williams:

I must say I was surprised that a person like you would bother to interview with Craven, Swine & Less. Your record gives new meaning to the word mediocre.

On the other hand, a bald willingness to ask for something you have no right to is worth something in this line of work, as you'd understand if you could have heard some of the arguments we used recently in a big antitrust suit. You've definitely got guts.

You couldn't possibly have a real future with us. We always need more toadies, however, and you might be okay for two or three years. Besides, we can bill your time as highly as that of our good associates.

I'm not willing to take sole responsibility for hiring you, so you'd better come down and meet some others. Since you're in the same city it won't cost us much to have you in.

Sincerely,

D. Carter Covington



"I must warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used against you."

* RODNEY R. JONES, ET AL., DISORDERLY CONDUCT 45 (1987) (Illustration by Lee Lorenz).