Legal Practice Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for a Legal Practice Manager role are usually run by the people who would be your colleagues and your internal clients, so expect a principal or managing partner in the room rather than a purely HR-led process. The panel is testing whether you understand the commercial reality of a fee-earning practice as well as the rules that sit around it.

- **Process and operations:** How you actually run recurring tasks such as trust reconciliation, month end reporting, billing cycles and staff rostering.
- **Behavioural and people leadership:** How you have handled underperformance, resistance to change from long-serving staff, or a disagreement with a partner.
- **Technical and systems:** Your hands-on familiarity with practice management systems, trust accounting requirements and reporting tools.
- **Compliance and regulatory:** How you keep the practice on the right side of the Legal Profession Uniform Law, trust accounting rules, practising certificates and professional indemnity insurance.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when a deadline, a partner and a compliance rule collide, often with no perfect option.
- **Client and commercial:** How you handle a client relationship issue that reaches the operations side, such as a disputed bill or a slow-paying long-standing client.

A first interview is generally with the managing partner or principal, sometimes with the office manager or HR, and runs through your background, your systems experience and a few behavioural questions. A second interview typically brings in a finance contact, an external accountant or another principal, and may include a short practical exercise such as talking through a trust reconciliation, reviewing a draft budget or outlining how you would introduce a new practice management system. Referees are usually contacted late, and questions about trust accounting and compliance are common because that is where the risk sits.

1. Walk me through how you run the trust account reconciliation each month, from the first step to sign-off.

Why they ask

Trust accounting is the single highest-risk function you will own, and the panel wants to hear that you know the sequence and the controls rather than just the software.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through with the checkpoints named at each stage: what you gather, what you compare, what you do when figures do not agree, and who signs off. Flag the controls as you go rather than saving them for the end.

Example answer

“At the start of the month I pull the bank statements and the trust ledger for every matter and confirm the opening balance matches the previous month's reconciled figure. I then work through receipts and payments, matching each transaction to its matter and checking that disbursements have been authorised before they left the account. If the ledger does not agree with the bank, I isolate the variance line by line before I touch anything else, because most differences come down to an unrecorded deposit or a payment posted to the wrong matter. I prepare the reconciliation statement, note any unpresented cheques or deposits in transit, and pass it to an authorised signatory for review and signature. I keep the working papers and the signed statement together, retain the records for the required seven year period, and raise anything I cannot resolve with the principal the same day rather

than letting it carry into the next month.”

2. Tell me about a time you had to introduce a new process or system to staff who did not want to change.

Why they ask

Legal support teams can be long-serving and loyal to the old way of doing things, so the panel is testing your ability to land change without losing the room.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with most of the space on the action and the result. Be specific about who resisted, what you did about it and what actually changed.

Example answer

“We moved from a paper-based file opening process to Actionstep, and two of the longest-serving administrators were openly sceptical, mainly because they had built their own workarounds over several years. Rather than announcing the change, I sat with each of them and asked what the current process did well and where it created rework. One of their points was genuinely good: the new intake form did not capture a field they used daily, so I had it added before we went live. I ran short sessions with each person at their own desk, gave them a one-page reference sheet, and for the first fortnight I sat nearby so problems were solved on the spot instead of festering. Within a month both were training newer staff on the system, and file opening moved from taking four days to being completed the same day.”

3. How would you decide whether to stay with our current practice management system or move to something like Clio or Actionstep?

Why they ask

System decisions are expensive and disruptive, and the panel wants to see that you can weigh cost, workflow and staff capability rather than chasing whichever product looks best in a demo.

How to structure your answer

A structured evaluation: define the problem, gather evidence, compare options against criteria, then recommend with a staged rollout. State clearly what would make you say no to a migration.

Example answer

“I would start by documenting what the current system actually fails at, not what people say they dislike about it. That means looking at where time is lost, such as duplicate data entry between the practice management system and Xero, files being reopened after closure, or reporting that has to be rebuilt manually every month. Then I would list the must-have requirements with the partners and the accounts team, covering trust accounting, matter management, document handling and reporting, and score the current system plus two or three alternatives against them. Cost matters, but so does the migration risk and how much training the team would need. If the gap is small I would push for better use of what we already have, because a migration costs months of lost productivity. If the gap is significant, I would recommend a phased rollout, starting with one practice group, with parallel running through the first trust reconciliation before switching everything over.”

4. A partner wants to release funds from the trust account for a client, but the paperwork is incomplete and they are pressing you to approve it today. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is the everyday version of the trust accounting risk. The panel is watching for whether you hold the line politely and whether you have a way to escalate without making it personal.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure. Name what is non-negotiable, what you would do to help the matter move, and how you escalate. Keep the tone collaborative, not confrontational.

Example answer

"I would explain plainly that I cannot authorise a trust payment without the supporting authority in the file, because that requirement does not bend for timing, and getting it wrong puts the firm and the partner personally at risk. Then I would focus on what can still happen today. If the client is available, I would ask the partner to get the written direction now and I would process the payment as soon as it arrives, staying back if needed. If the missing item is a bill or an authority that can be produced internally, I would chase it myself. If the partner keeps pushing, I would take it to the principal or managing partner rather than signing something I should not, and I would keep a written note of the request and my response in the file. I would rather have an awkward conversation now than explain a trust deficiency to the law society later."

5. How do you keep a practice compliant across the year, given the range of obligations from practising certificates to professional indemnity insurance?

Why they ask

Compliance is spread across many small deadlines, and the panel wants evidence you run it as a system rather than reacting when something falls due.

How to structure your answer

Describe your system, then give a concrete example of it catching something early. Finish with how you keep the partners informed without burying them.

Example answer

"I run a compliance calendar with every recurring obligation in it, including practising certificate renewals, professional indemnity insurance renewal, trust account requirements, continuing professional development for each fee earner and any reporting obligations to the regulator. Each item has an owner, a due date and a lead time, so renewals are started well before the deadline rather than in the week they fall due. I keep a single register with the supporting documents attached, which means an inspection or an insurer query can be answered from one place. That approach paid off when the professional indemnity renewal came around and an insurer asked for detail on our file closing procedures, which I had documented months earlier as part of our internal process work. I report to the partners on a short monthly summary, exceptions only, so they can see what is coming up without reading a full register."

6. One of our larger clients consistently pays late, and the relationship partner does not want to push them. How would you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests whether you can protect the firm's cash flow and still respect the client relationship, which is the line a practice manager walks constantly.

How to structure your answer

A commercial judgement answer: gather the facts, separate the relationship question from the process question, propose options, and set a trigger for escalation.

Example answer

"First I would look at the facts rather than the story, checking the payment history, the size of the outstanding balance, the terms in the engagement letter and whether the invoices themselves have been clear and timely. Often late payment is a billing process problem rather than a client problem. I would then speak with the relationship partner about what they are protecting, because there may be a reason they are treading carefully. From there I would suggest changes that do not require confrontation, such as issuing invoices earlier in the matter, setting a shorter payment term for new work, or asking for a payment arrangement in writing with agreed instalments. If the balance keeps growing anyway, I would set a clear trigger, for example a set number of days past due or a set

amount outstanding, at which the matter goes on stop and the partner raises it with the client directly. That way the decision is made calmly in advance rather than in the middle of a difficult phone call."