

## LEGAL RIGHTS



By Atty. Johnson Lazaro

ONE week ago, we represented a client at the US Embassy in Manila. We soon found out that some things in the Embassy never change. It is still pandemonium. People are running here and there – confused. The Consuls are still stressed and seemingly bored with their jobs. Filipinos applying for tourist visas are still worried for some inevitable denials. It is still crowded and hot and just the place that you want to avoid. The only consolation is seeing some happy faces with approval letters in their hands as they get set to start a new life in America.

So when it comes your turn to do the visa interview thing – better get ready. You will come face to face with one of the 26 consular officers in Manila. Their time is extremely limited. You will be given just enough time to show your documents and to show why you should be given a visa out of the country. Your future is now in your corner.

Read your notice of interview. Sometimes people get so anxious and eager at the thought of being interviewed in the Embassy that they forget to review and thoroughly understand the letter from the Embassy. There are different types of interviews and procedures for different visas. People applying for non-immigrant visas (NIV) are interviewed by appointment only. The most common type of NIV is used by tourists. These visas are also used by business people looking for opportunities in America and temporary employees.

# Visa Interviews in Manila

Manila has established the VisaPoint System, an online appointment scheduling system which can be accessed 24/7 to make appointments especially designed for non-immigrant visa applicants. The US Embassy in Manila has one of most informative websites of all consular posts in the world. If you have internet access, you must check their website as part of your preparation. There are information for early appointments and urgent travels.

In preparing your documents, be advised that consuls prefer to see original documents. Some common documents are: academic transcripts, degrees, professional licenses, and job letters. If originals are unavailable be sure to have an explanation ready.

For tourist applicants, denials are extremely high. Young, single, unemployed applicants coming to the United States to visit are certainly high risks for refusal. Some applicants have reported that all it took was one look from the consul to deny the application – harsh but true.

For applicants coming to the US to work, be sure you know your job well. For example, if you are coming into the US to work as a nurse, not only must your documentation and work history be order, you must know your job description by heart. Some consuls may ask you about nursing procedures. Make no mistake, your skills and knowledge of your job will be discussed at the interview.

If you are an accountant, market analyst, software engineer or other professionals, know your job requirements and your job location in the US. You must know your company and your immediate supervisor. Talk to your boss before the interview and make sure you are on the same page. Sad but true -- many Filipinos are victimized by recruiters in many occupations, including IT, Nurses, Physical Therapists, and most recently, teachers.

Applicants often falter because of nervousness when orally testifying at the visa interview about their job description. As hard as it is, you must remain calm and collected during the interview. Try talking with others who have gone through the process. And remember if your visa is denied, it won't be the end of the world. You must learn from your mistakes, re-package your application, and decide whether to apply again.

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Atty. Johnson Lazaro represents immigrants in all Federal Courts in the United States. Lazaro and Associates specializes in difficult immigration cases as well as business immigration and family visa petitions. The firm's offices are located in San Francisco and Fremont/Newark/Union City in California, and Makati City (Philippines), with tel. no. (415) 278-9577, e-mail at Law@LazaroLaw.com, and website at www.LazaroLaw.com. This article should not be taken as legal advice for any individual case or situation. The information is intended to be general and should not be relied upon for any specific situation. This is not meant to create a lawyer-client relationship.

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