The STAR Model

How to answer a competency-based question: the STAR model

The interviewers will be looking for specific examples describing exactly what you did in certain situations. You can choose relevant examples from your current job, a previous job or a situation outside of work altogether. It is likely that the interviewers will then follow with some probing questions. They will be interested in the outcome of the situation and whether there was anything you learned from the experience.

The STAR model will provide a structure to your answers:
• **Situation** – describe a situation or problem that you have encountered.
• **Task** – describe the task that needed to be accomplished.
• **Action** – describe the action you took including obstacles that you had to overcome.
• **Results** – highlight outcomes achieved.

Top Tips

Situation – think of this section as 'setting the scene'. Provide the interviewer with the bit of background about the question, and give them some context. Try and be specific, include names and dates wherever appropriate to help add credibility.

Task – Build on the background you've given and outline the task at hand. Specifically, how did the situation relate to you? What were the major tasks you needed to undertake to resolve it? Include how important or difficult the situation was to overcome, as well as any constraints you came up against.

Action – What did you do to resolve the situation? Outline the steps you took to ensure a successful outcome, without being tempted to take all the credit. The key to effectively incorporating the 'action" part of your answer is to identify what skills the interviewer really wants to see and reinforce them throughout.

Result – What was the outcome of the situation?
Remember, everyone loves a happy ending and recruiters are no different. This is your chance to shine by making your happy ending quantifiable.

As with general interview questions, it is worthwhile preparing answers to possible competency based questions. The good news is that normally companies will inform you of the competencies on which they will base their questions so you can have 2 or 3 examples prepared using the **STAR** Model for each competency.

Examples - Competency based interviews: STAR model response

A candidate for an administrative assistant role is asked *"Tell me about a time when you used your initiative at work"*

Situation: *"I had been working in my current job for 6 months and had noticed that there were duplications in paperwork for purchase orders. I asked the office supervisor why we did it that way and she said she didn't now, it had always been like that. I asked my boss and some colleagues, and no one knew why but everyone agreed that it was very time consuming and took up a lot of space."*

Task: *"I looked at all the paperwork we used for purchase orders and considered the information we needed. I realised that we could gather, store and review all the information required by using one database rather than 3 document folders."*

Action: *"I then made up an Access database of all our suppliers as well as an Excel spreadsheet of all money spent set out in tabs month by month. I showed them to my supervisor and explained how this system worked: she said it was a very good idea and easy to use.*

My supervisor showed my spreadsheet and database to the boss who thought it was a simple and effective system. I transferred all the purchase order paperwork for the previous financial year onto the database and spreadsheet. I also trained all staff in how to record the purchases and suppliers in the new system. In addition, I produced a flow chart explaining how to do this for easy reference should people need a quick reminder of the process."

Result: *"Everyone agreed that my new system was more efficient and easier to use. The boss was pleased because he could access the monthly purchases easily on one sheet."*

A candidate for a customer services role is asked *"Describe a situation when you had to deliver excellent customer service following a complaint"*

Situation: *"A customer rang up complaining that they'd waited more than two weeks for a reply from our sales team regarding a product query."*

Task: *"I needed to address the client's immediate query and find out what went wrong in the normal process."*

Action: *"I apologised, got the details and passed them to our head salesperson, who contacted the client within the hour. I investigated why the query hadn't been answered. I discovered that it was a combination of a wrong mobile number and a generic email address that wasn't being checked. I let the client know and we offered a goodwill discount on her next order."*

Result: *"The client not only continued to order from us but posted a positive customer service tweet."*