



A guide to

Competency Based Interviews



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What is a

Competency Based Interview?

"Competencies are defined as behavioural traits combined with technical knowledge and skills that will serve as indicators of success in specific jobs or positions"

The questions will prompt you to provide real-life examples of how you handled a certain kind of situation at work in the past.

These questions will normally start with:

- Tell me about...
- What do you do when...
- Give me an example of...
- Describe a...

What is assessed at the Competency Based Interview?

SKILL – KNOWLEDGE – COMPETENCY

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Examples of common competencies:

1. Teamwork
2. Responsibility
3. Commercial Awareness
4. Decision Making
5. Communication
6. Leadership
7. Trustworthiness & Ethics
8. Results Orientation
9. Problem Solving
10. Organisational Skills

STAR Technique

The star technique is the most commonly used way of answering a competency-based question. Essentially, it leads you to 'tell a story' around a specific event, that has taken place. It is important to always use the word 'I' and not 'we' in a competency-based interview, as the interviewer is only interested in the things you did, and the part you played, not that of a team.

Situation

Describe the context within which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with a co-worker. This situation can be drawn from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific as possible.

Task

Describe your responsibility in that situation. Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project within a tight deadline, resolve a conflict with a co-worker, or hit a sales target.

Action

You then describe how you completed the task or endeavoured to meet the challenge. Focus on what you did, rather than what your team, boss, or colleague did. Remember to say 'I' not 'we'.

Results

Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. Focus in on what you achieved or what you learned in the situation.

Preparing for

a Competency Based Interview?

Look at the company's website, sometimes you will be able to gauge what competencies are likely to be judged by working out the businesses core values. Otherwise read the job specification carefully and look at the skills or experiences that are required for the job. Make a list of both and then write specific examples of where you have demonstrated the value, skill or experience. Structure those examples into an answer using the STAR headings.

EXAMPLES

Q1 – Influencing

Describe your most satisfying (or disappointing) experience in presenting to, and gaining the support of, top management for an idea or proposal.

A1 – I was asked by Top Management to look into a way of reducing the debtor days. I went away to look at reasons why cash flow was in a worse position than normal and noted that the amount of debt in query was much higher than normal. I presented my suggestion to Top Management, which was that we should set up a weekly call with the Sales Managers to discuss debt that was in query. If they could not resolve this within 2 weeks, then commission would be withheld from them and their teams. The board agreed with the suggestion and the idea was put into place. This led to two wins, a reduction in queried debt of 80% within 2 months and reducing debtor days from 48 days to 38.

Q2 – Team Work

Tell me about a situation where you have been part of a group working toward a specific goal. What was your role in the group?

A2 – As a leading member of the finance team, I was asked to join a 'working group' looking at the most suitable ERP system to implement into the company. I was tasked with specifically looking at the transactional capabilities of the systems that were being presented to us. Along with the rest of the group we worked together to put a list of 'pros and cons' together and made the decision that SAP would be the best choice. I was then played a large part of the team in both implementing and training on the new system. The system went live without problems and a year down the line the efficiencies have meant that when 2 members of the AP team left they did not need to be replaced. Thus, the system has led to both time and cost savings.

Q3 – Achievement Focus

Tell me about the last time you had a lot of work to do within a very limited deadline. How did you go about it?

A3 – The Directors of my last company had a tender to put together at short notice and needed financial information at very short notice. It was 4pm when they told me and they needed the information by 8am to add to their presentation. I managed to convince the 3 people in my team to stay behind and pull the information together. I explained to them the importance to the company as the tender could lead to us gaining one of our biggest clients. I offered take aways and I split the work out between the 4 of us. As the information was passed to me by each team member I was able to put it all together into the tender document and left at 10pm, to take the others for a much needed thank you drink. The tender was successfully won where it would not have been without the information and the client that was bought on board it the 2nd biggest spender.

Topics to consider when asking questions

After the questions have been asked, remember you will probably be asked what questions you have for the interviewer. It is amazing how often the interviewer feels that the candidate is not interested because they do not ask questions at this point. Always have a few questions in mind, just in case you can't think of anything on the spot. A few ideas are below:

- Training delivered and courses offered?
- The wider department and internal relationships?
- Challenges they envisage in the role?
- Changes seen within the company/team in recent years?
- Scope for development or increased responsibility?
- What they think it takes to succeed in the role?
- What the interviewer likes most about the business?

CONCLUSION

- Good Presentations (*try and find out competencies/core values of the business before going*) = Strong Interview.
- Follow the **STAR** Methodology.
- Always 'I' not 'we' or 'my team'.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions to clarify exactly what the interviewer is asking you.
- Always have questions prepared to ask the interviewer.

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