

Recruitment

Competency interviews - are you prepared?

Lisa Jarvis from Permanent Solutions Direct gives her advice on this now widely used form of interviewing.

Increasingly, employers are using Competency based (otherwise known as Behavioural or Situational) interview techniques to ensure a robust and consistent process, during which all candidates will be measured against the same criteria. This style of interviewing is often used in conjunction with a more informal discussion where the candidate's CV is reviewed chronologically, which may take place during the same interview, or on a separate occasion.

Competency based interviewing is based on the theory that past behaviour is a true indicator of future behaviour, and therefore performance in the role, with structured questions that directly relate to the essential criteria and competencies required for the position.

Employers are not interested in hypothetical or theoretical answers to their questions; they want to hear from your experience. A good way of dealing with this type of question would be to adopt the STAR approach.

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action and Result. If you follow this process you will be able to prepare your answers in a mini essay format. The Situation and Task are usually combined and help to form an introduction, typically describing the scenario you faced. The Action part forms the main part of the answer, and therefore the longest. Finally, the Result is the conclusion, and, similar to the Introduction, it should be fairly short.

SITUATION - Where, When, with Whom?

TASK - Describe the situation or the task you were faced with.

ACTION - How, what action did YOU take? A classic mistake here is when people focus on group



achievements without mentioning their individual contribution.

RESULT - What results did you achieve or conclusions did you reach? What did you learn from the experience?

When providing your answer to a competency based question the key principle is to give a real example of something that happened to YOU. Don't talk broadly about how you may tackle a situation, make it specific. Once you have answered the question the interviewer will probably probe further to gain a greater understanding of what you did, so be prepared to expand further and provide sufficient detail to demonstrate your experience.

Below you will find an example of a typical Competency based question, and a suitable response following the STAR process:

QUESTION:

Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a person or group task at work?

ANSWER:

SITUATION - 'Whilst employed at (company name) last year.....

TASK - I was given the task of rationalising the stock control system

ACTION - I would look at factors such as what the stock was used for, how often did we use it and when it was last ordered? I was responsible for streamlining the paperwork and redesigning the essential documentation and presenting my findings to my line Manager.

RESULT - My ideas were accepted and implemented, resulting in a 15% reduction in stock levels.'

For further information on How to Succeed at Interviews please contact Permanent Solutions Direct.

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Dr Alison Taylor
NHS & NHS.uk - MC (A) MR (L) Dip
Homeopathic Physician
A more holistic approach to medicine

32 The Drive
Hove
East Sussex BN1 5JD
01273 820082
info@dralisonataylor.co.uk

Arday House, High Street
Horfield
West Sussex BN15 9JN
01273 99777
www.dralisonataylor.co.uk