

How to provide a STAR interview answer

The STAR interview format is often used by employers who hold structured competency based interviews but understanding STAR can help you be the STAR in any interview.

First things first . . . what is STAR?

STAR stands for:

Situation

Task

Action

Result

The STAR interview format is often used by employers who hold structured competency based interviews but understanding STAR can help you be the STAR in any interview. This format is a universally recognised technique for assessing responses in an interview setting.

Some interviewers use STAR to score you based on how well you communicate your answer across each element of STAR. They do not always disclose that they are using this technique, in which case you could be losing ‘points’ without knowing.

More forgiving interviewers give you advance warning of a competency based interview, in which case you should assume they will use STAR. Others will not necessarily judge you based on your STAR structure but may use it to probe and guide you to get further information and the full picture e.g. ‘What was the situation that lead to you taking that action’ or ‘What was the result of that action’?

There is a strong possibility any interview you attend could follow the STAR structure, so it is always good to prepare yourself. Regardless of whether an interviewer is expecting your answers in this format or not, providing clear, structured answers you will only improve how you communicate and is likely to make the interviewer more receptive.

So, when preparing for an interview we recommend that you get a clear understanding and write a list of the desired skills and competencies that the employer is looking for. Think about and write out some STAR examples of how you can demonstrate that you have the required skills and experience.

Each answer should be concise and informative; you may find bullet point notes help you with this. The examples below are for the required skill and competency of Budget Management -



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1. Situation

Describe the situation that you were confronted with to set the context.

“When I started as the Project Manager the EOY budget closed with a loss of £400,000 with issues of both overspending and low revenues”.

2. Task

Describe the task or responsibility you had.

“It was my responsibility to get the P&L to breakeven, without damaging the integrity of the product and thus securing its profitable future.”

3. Action

This is the most important section and should demonstrate and highlight the skills and personal attributes that the question is testing.

Whilst still being concise, you should provide some details here. Explain what you did, how you did it and why you did it. 5-10 bullet points should be sufficient.

4. Result

This is probably the most crucial part of your answer; you need to explain what you accomplished with tangible, measurable details. Here you can describe the outcome and also what you learnt in that situation which makes the answer personal and enables you to highlight what skills you would bring to the interviewers company. 5-10 bullet points should be sufficient.

Your results should demonstrate that the actions you took had specific objectives and were effective.

Once you have been through the above steps for each of the key competencies and required skills it is important to review them and learn them! We tell our candidates “You are only as good as your interview”, which is why it is important to put the time and effort into your job interview preparation.

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