

HOW TO STAR IN INTERVIEWS

Here is a little secret- good interviewers are focusing less on the traditional 'sales pitch' type questions (where they ask candidates to describe strengths and goals), to focus more on COMPETENCY. In fact, I've seen this type of interview catch even seasoned HR Managers off guard, so as a New Year present to you, let me explain how to tackle this kind of situation.

It is important to understand first what a competency is. Competencies are defined as behavior combined with technical knowledge and skill that serve as indicators of success in a position. Each position requires successful applicants to have different competencies. Therefore, qualified interviewers analyze the competencies required in the role you are being interviewed for and will design a standard and thorough set of questions to examine if the candidates possess those competencies. The interviewer will be focusing on assessing relevant past behavior and performance, using that as an indicator towards future behavior and performance. For each question, you will be probed and asked to give relevant examples of experience.

The trick is to understand what key competencies will be required in the role you are being interviewed for and what key 'values' the interviewing organization focuses on in their recruits. Organizations tend to have 'key values' or 'visions' that you could find out about from their websites or friends who already work there. For example, if the organization prides itself in recruiting the leaders of tomorrow, you can expect questions such as: 'summarize a situation where you took the initiative to get others to act on an important issue and played a leading role to achieve the results wanted'. Your answer will then be probed: 'what was your specific role/how did you organize people/what was the outcome?'

Now, the magic needed here is called the 'STAR' response. To guide the discussion professionally, use the STAR:

1. **ST**: Situation or Task: describe the context in which the action took place.
2. **A**: Action: logically take the interviewer through the steps you took to handle the situation or resolve the problem. Keep your answers clear, methodical and concise.
3. **R**: Result: explain your results/outcomes, even if you were not as successful as you had hoped, it is important to show you tried; what you learned and that you understood the outcome and why it happened; the impact it had.

When preparing for interviews, prepare to be grilled. So, apart from trying to preempt the competencies they will be examining, ensure you know your CV backwards and be ready to elaborate on whatever responsibilities, achievements and key competencies you listed on the CV. Mentally refresh yourself on your experience so as to have relevant examples at your fingertips. Prepare 'STAR' responses for the competencies you think will be needed for success in the position you are aiming for. If you are fresh from college, use examples from volunteer activities, clubs and organizations, school and educational endeavors. If you are mid-career, keep your examples work related and task relevant.

If you get STAR right, you will shine at interview. And remember, no matter what interview style is being used, you should still keep in mind the five basic Ps of interviews: punctuality, presentation, positive, proactive and polite!

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