



## **INTERVIEW – HINTS AND TIPS**

Congratulations you have reached the interview stage; you can deduce several things from this. Firstly that the company are interested in what you have to offer, they have read your CV and they have liked what they have seen. You will also have lost much of the competition, as only approximately 15% of applicants reach this stage.

Having established that you have the fundamental qualifications for the job, you have to build upon this and impress the interviewers with your personality. The purpose of an interview is for the employer to meet you in person and evaluate whether your personality will fit into their company.

For you an interview is a chance to impress and see if this company has an environment in which you would like to work.

### **First impressions**

Research by psychologists has shown that people decide what they think of you within four minutes of a first meeting, therefore is very important to make a good impression right from the start.

Get all of your preparation out of the way well in advance, and allow plenty of time to get to the interview so that you arrive in a cool calm state. Arrive ten minutes early and use the bathroom facilities to smarten your appearance. You will not be so nervous if you are well prepared and look your best.

Confidence is the magic word, if you are confident then you will be relaxed and able to talk lucidly about yourself, you will be able to look the interviewer in the eyes, you will not fidget - you will have the potential to clinch the job.

If you are not feeling very self-assured just think, you wouldn't have reached the interview stage if you didn't possess the attributes that the company desires. Looking your best and being well prepared should help, so that when you meet the interviewer you will be able to greet them openly with a smile, look them in the eyes and shake their hand.

Don't let confidence come across as arrogance. Excess confidence can come across this way and it's not an attractive trait for the employer as it implies that you are not a good team player.

### **Multiple personalities**

The subject of this article is 'how to get your personality across'. However an employer will be looking for different personality traits depending on the type of job to which you are applying. For example, sales personnel have to be very outgoing and sociable, and these characteristics are not so necessary for a software engineer. If your natural personality is not really suitable for the job to which you are applying then you should seriously reconsider the direction of your career because otherwise you may not be happy in the long term.

### **Attractive features that are desirable to all employers include:**

#### **Confidence**

This can be expressed in so many ways. Look the interviewer in the eyes, shake their hand firmly. Be chatty and lucid, sit with good straight posture with your hands on your lap, be precise in your answers do not 'Um and ah'. Confidence comes with experience, so tell the interviewer about difficult situations that you negotiated in your previous jobs, perhaps even mention your world travels or a time you held a position of power within an organisation.

#### **Approachability**

To express approachability be friendly and open, smile and pleasantly greet everyone you are introduced to. Perhaps you trained other personnel in a previous job, or were a counsellor at college; recount an occasion when professionally someone came to you with their problem.

#### **Sense of humour**

Do not set about cracking jokes, but be responsive if the interviewer makes a humorous comment (even if it is not very funny). If you can subtly incorporate humour which is not at the expense of anyone else then do so, but bear in mind that this is a business interview and you should be professional.

### **Responsibility/trustworthiness**

These qualities cannot be really seen in a person, but you can recount the times in your previous jobs that you have held positions of responsibility. For example any job in which you had personnel beneath you, or if you were a scout/Guide leader.

### **Initiative/leadership**

These qualities are linked to confidence, but in addition show the employer examples of times you have used these skills and have prospered as a result. For example, you worked on a software solution to a work problem in your own time and it turned out to increase the efficiency of the task by 60%.

### **Body language**

A first impression can be greatly influenced by a person's body language. You are in trouble if all the right things are coming from your mouth, but your body is doing all the wrong things.

#### **Do's**

Eye contact - on first meeting and at regular times during the interview. This displays interest and sincerity, but do not stare.

Raise and lower your eyebrows - briefly when you first meet. It draws attention to your face and although it is subtle, not doing it can create hostility.

Handshake - return a handshake with the same pressure offered by the other person, avoid using a handshake that is too strong or too weak.

Walk tall - Have a relaxed but confident posture as it conveys confidence and honesty.

Opening palms and arms - Honesty and openness

#### **Don'ts**

· Fidget - Playing with your CV, bag, hair, a pencil or drumming your fingers betrays anxiety. Beware of your feet fidgeting also.

· Rub your ear - Gently massaging or tugging on the ear lobe betrays a subconscious desire to block out the speakers' words.

· Scratch your neck - If the interviewer knows his body language, then they may suspect that what you are saying conflicts with your true feelings.

· Tug your collar - An interviewer may think you are telling lies.

· Smooth the back of your head - indicates uncertainty

If you see any of the following, the chances are you'll have to work harder to convince the interviewer you are the person for the job:

- If they are leaning away from you
- If they fold their arms or cross their legs
- If they firmly grip their upper arms. This represents either high anxiety or extreme anger and conveys almost total rejection. It is the clearest possible sign that he or she is uninterested in what you're saying.

Chat to the interviewer when they first meet you and take you to their office. After the interview confirm when you can expect to hear a decision from them, then move the conversation on to another matter. There is no definitive formula for interview success, just be relaxed and friendly, the easiest way to get your personality across is to be yourself.

## Interview FAQ and Answers

### 1. What do I wear to an interview?

Dress smartly preferably in a suit. Both men and women should wear conservative clothes, men ensure your shirts are ironed and your tie is not too garish. Women have the option to wear trousers or a skirt, and shoes should be sensible.

### 2. What does an interview entail?

If you have reached the interview stage the employer has already noted from your CV that you have the essential qualifications for the job. An interview expands on this and shows what you are like in person and whether your character is suitable for the company. An interview also provides you with an insight into what it is like to work at this company. You will be asked questions relating to your previous positions your experience and what responsibilities you have held. The interviewer will probably ask you about certain aspects of your CV and what your long-term career goals are.

### 3. What should I take to an interview?

Take a couple of copies of your CV in case the one you sent to the company has gone astray. If possible take a portfolio of relevant work which you have done. A pen and paper to make notes with after the interview, perhaps you need to take a tube map or A-Z so that you can find the offices in the first place.

### 4. What sort of questions can I expect?

The interviewer wants to assess your suitability for the job, so you will be asked about what your previous responsibilities entailed, your qualifications, why you want the job, what you can bring to the company and perhaps some questions about what you enjoy doing out of work.

### 5. How long are interviews?

An interview usually lasts for about an hour, you should definitely aim to be in the office for at least that amount of time.

### 6. Who will interview me?

The head of the department to which you are applying, or a member of the human resources team will interview you. It is possible that there will be more than one interviewer, in which case the panel will be made up of HR personnel, Managers, and people who you would be working with directly should you get the job.

### 7. Are there different types of interview?

Interviews can be conducted in a number of ways. There are one-on-one interviews, panel/committee interviews, lunchtime interviews, and telephone interviews. Whilst the format may vary, the purpose of the interview will be the same, to get an insight into your personality and to see if you are suitable for their company.

### 8. How should I prepare for an interview?

- Carry out research into the company, find out exactly what they do, and how many people they employ. What is their history and what is their future business strategy.
- Make sure you know exactly where your interview is so you arrive punctually on the day.
- You may like to practice by answering some commonly posed interview questions.

### 9. What qualities are interviewers looking for?

The things that interviews will be looking for depends upon the industry sector and type of job that you are applying to. Generally employers are looking for:

- Motivation
- Confidence
- Sociability
- Initiative
- Honesty
- Intellect
- Enthusiasm

## Typical interview questions and best responses

### 1. Tell me about yourself

- Keep your answer to one or two minutes; **don't ramble**.
- Do not go back to childhood experiences; just give a brief outline of where you are from, and where you want to be going.
- Use your CV introduction as a base to start.
- Respond in a way that leaves no doubt that you are well adjusted, stable and positive.
- Say only **positive** statements

### 2. What do you know about our company?

- Show that you have done your research, know what their products are, how big the company is, roughly what their annual revenue is, what reputation it has within the industry and on the street. Know the company's history, image, goal, and philosophy.
- Project an informed interest and let the interviewer tell you some more detailed aspects about the company.

### 3. Why do you want to work for us?

- Don't talk about what you want; first talk about their needs, what you can do for them.
- You wish to be part of their company project.
- You would like to solve their company problem and relish the challenge.
- You can make a definite contribution to specific company goals: identify its management talent, etc.

### 4. What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

- Relate past experiences that represent success in solving previous employer problems that may be similar to those of the prospective employer.
- Stay positive

### 5. What about our position do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?

- List three or more attractive factors and only one minor unattractive factor, aspects to pick up on could include, office location, company reputation, the chance to work with esteemed colleagues.

### 6. Why should we hire you?

- Because of the knowledge, experience, abilities, and skills you possess. Be very positive and confident in your reply, not vague.

### 7. What do you look for in a job?

- An opportunity to use my skills, to perform and be recognised.
- The opportunity to develop further skills, throughout life we should be constantly learning.
- Vague answers such as, "I enjoy working with people, I relish challenges in my work"
- Relate it to the job to which you are applying "I am especially interested in producing a software solution to your problem"

### 8. Please give me your definition of a ... (the position for which you are being interviewed).

- Keep it brief, actions and results oriented

### 9. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

- Very quickly after a little orientation and a brief period of adjustment on the learning curve.

### 10. How long would you stay with us?

- As long as we both feel I'm contributing, achieving, growing etc.

## Management and Experience Questions

### 11. What is your management style?

- (If you've never thought about this, it's high time you did) for example 'Management by Coaching and Development (MBCD)' when Managers see themselves primarily as employee trainers. 'Open door' is a good one.

### 12. Are you a good manager? Give an example. Why do you feel you have top managerial potential?

- Keep your answers, achievement and task oriented, emphasise management skills-- planning, organising, controlling, interpersonal, etc.
- Describe relevant personal traits.

### 13. What did you look for when you hired people in the past?

- Skills, initiative, adaptability

### 14. Did you ever fire anyone? If so, what were the reasons and how did you handle it?

- You have had experience with this and it worked out well.
- Describe how you spoke to the person and explained precisely but tactfully where they were underachieving.

### 15. What do you see as being the most difficult task in being a manager?

- Getting things planned and done on time within the budget.
- Do not imply that these are insurmountable difficulties.

### 16. What is your biggest weakness as a manager?

- Be honest and end on a positive note.

## Industry trend questions

### 18. Why are you leaving your present job?

- No longer provides a suitable challenge, time to move on, I wish to move into ...(the area this company specialises in)
- Give a "group" answer if possible, e.g. our department was consolidated or eliminated.

### 19. How do you feel about leaving all your benefits?

- You feel the challenge and satisfaction this new role will bring outweigh benefits lost.

### 20. Describe what you feel to be the perfect working environment.

- Where people are treated as fairly as possible.
- Don't mention 'naked Fridays'

### 21. How would you evaluate your present firm?

- An excellent company which afforded me many fine experiences.

## Quantifying Your Experience and Accomplishments

### 22. Have you helped increase sales? profits? how?

- Imply many occasions, then concentrate on describing one in detail.
- Quote percentage profit increases facts and figures.

### 23. Have you helped reduce costs? How?

- Same as above.

### 24. How much money did you ever account for?

- Be specific and recount a particular contract with facts and figures.

### 25. How many people did you supervise on your last job?

- Be specific - the more the better.

**26. Do you like working with figures more than words?**

- Be honest but positive.
- Don't say "depends on the figures -nudge nudge wink wink..."

**27. In your current or last position, what features did you like the most? Least?**

- Relate your response to what the new job can offer

**28. In your current or last position, what are or were your five most significant accomplishments?**

- You could refer to the key accomplishments already identified your CV.

**Your work style and habits**

**29. If I spoke with your previous boss, what would he say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?**

- Emphasise skills - don't be overly negative about your weaknesses; it's always safe to identify a lack of a skill or experience as a shortcoming rather than a personal characteristic.

**30. Can you work under pressures, deadlines, etc.?**

- Yes. Quite simply, it is a way of life in business.

**31. In your present position, what problems have you identified that had previously been overlooked?**

- Keep it brief and be sure to say how you overcame the problems.

**32. Don't you feel you might be better off in a different size company? Different type company?**

- Depends on the job - elaborate slightly.
- Reiterate how your previous experience lends itself to the job you are applying for with this company.

**33. How do you resolve conflict on a project team?**

- First discuss issues privately and tactfully. If the problem is not resolved then action would need to be taken which could mean removing a member of the team in a severe case.

**34. What was the most difficult decision you ever had to make?**

- Attempt to relate your response to the prospective employment situation.
- Do not mention the time you had to choose between Emmy Lou or her twin sister Scarlet O'Hara. Or whether to wear the blue or red tie to the interview.

**Salary questions**

**35. How much are you looking for?**

- Answer with a question, i.e., "What is the salary range for similar jobs in your company?"
- If they don't answer, then give a range of what you understand you are worth in the marketplace.

**36. How much do you expect, if we offer this position to you?**

- Be careful; the market value of the job may be the key answer e.g., "My understanding is that a job like the one you're describing may be in the range of £...."

**37. What kind of salary are you worth?**

- Have a specific figure in mind... don't be hesitant.

**Personality questions**

**38. What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended?**

- Talk about books, sports or films to represent balance in you life.
- Stick to something fairly mainstream or classic

**39. How would you describe your own personality?**

- Balanced.
- Fair, honest, reliable, friendly, outgoing etc.

#### **40. What are your strong points?**

- Present at least three and relate them to the interviewing company and job opening.
- Tailor your answer to meet the needs of the employer. "I see myself as a goal orientated individual..." discuss how in your previous role you achieved above projected results.

#### **41. What are your weak points?**

- Don't say you haven't any.
- Try not to cite personal characteristics as weaknesses, but be ready to have one if interviewer presses.
- Try to transform your response and the question into strength. "I'm the kind of person who likes challenges and gets involved. Some people may see that as butting in, ' but I'm sure it could be looked at as a strength because I like to make sure the job gets done correctly."

You should also be prepared to answer questions about your health, more technical questions related to your qualifications, research or current job, plus any interests you have mentioned on your CV or application form.

### **Things to look out for at interviews**

When attending an interview do not leave anything to chance, by preparing thoroughly before hand you will be ready for whatever the dastardly interviewer chooses to throw at you, unless it is furniture in which case it is a safe bet to assume that you haven't got the job.

If you are to keep your cool even during the interview from hell, consider the following situations and think how you would react.

#### **Deliberate attempts by the interviewer to crack your resolve**

##### **The interviewer brings in other colleagues to meet and question you unexpectedly during the interview.**

When the new entrants to the room are introduced stand and shake their hands, smile, make eye contact, and greet them.

Resume your seat as before and listen to what they have to say and respond accordingly, try not to repeat information that you have already covered with the interviewer. You may want to make reference to what has already been said "I was just explaining to Mr Taylor that in my previous managerial position I..."

Try to pose questions to the new comers that are relevant to their role within the company.

##### **Handle criticism of your CV**

The interviewer may set about picking holes in your CV. Do not become defensive, take on board their criticisms and say why you did it a different way. They must have thought your CV was good enough or else you wouldn't have reached the interview stage.

##### **Tough, aggressive questioning**

The interviewer may pose a couple of deliberately spiked questions to see how you respond under pressure. Do not worry they are not going to shine a bright light in your eyes and ask, "what were you doing on the night of the 14th"? Take it easy, do not become defensive and reply in a considered way.

##### ***"I suppose in a couple of years time, you'll be wanting to get married and start a family?"***

"For the foreseeable future my career is a greater priority than starting a family". If it is your intention to have children in the near future ask what provision the company could make for maternity leave, be positive and state that you would intend to return to work after the birth as soon as possible. Reply honestly.

##### ***"I see that you failed a few subjects in your degree, can you explain what happened"***

If the reason for this academic lapse was due to excess beer drinking and partying it is probably best not to admit to this. Instead say something like "I found moving from A-Levels to Degree level to be a steeper transition than expected and it took me a while to adjust", if you feel inclined you can say that you failed because you were having "personal; problems" the interviewer will probably not enquire deeper. If the reason was due to worthwhile extra curricular activities encroaching on study time or sickness, then say so.

### **Unexpected tests**

It is possible that when you arrive at the interview there will be a test set up for you, or a role playing exercise to take part in. Do not refuse to carry it out, just do your best. If you are asked if you need more time to finish, do not feel too proud to accept it. Take your time, accuracy is often more important than quantity of output.

## **Chance circumstances that could slip you up**

### **The Interviewer may be having a bad day**

Be patient, the interviewer may be very busy, do not be perturbed if they do not instantly know why you are visiting. They may be running late, if you have to wait for a long time use the bathroom facilities, flick through a newspaper, focus on what you want to say during the interview, perhaps chat to the receptionist.

### **The interviewer may be younger than yourself**

If you are applying to an Internet firm or any new start-up business then it is conceivable that the employer will be your junior. If you are many years older, do not be offended if the interviewer shows little respect, and similarly you should not say anything patronising. It is best to forget it, and not to draw attention to the fact, for example do not say, "Ah, I remember when I was your age, this tower block was a green field, and I used to collect bottle caps for a crown a piece".

### **If the person supposed to be interviewing you is not available and someone else has to stand in**

Do not let this phase you, there are many reasons why the original interviewer may not have been able to make it, for example due to illness, a double diary booking, or an urgent appointment. Ask if it would be convenient for you to come back on another occasion, if they say that it is not necessary then go ahead with the interview with the same confidence and aplomb as you would any other.

### **You know one or the entire panel of interviewers**

Ignore this fact, do not start calling people by their Christian names. Remain professional and answer their questions as if they had never met you before.

### **Badly prepared interviewers**

Be patient and not critical of their incompetence.

### **Questions you don't know the answer to**

It is better to say, "I'm sorry I don't know the answer to that question" rather than to 'Um and Ah' a lot and say a lot of rubbish.

### **Questions where you are asked to give an opinion**

Give a balanced view, offering both sides of the argument. If you know what the company policy on the matter is, perhaps go with that, or if you can explain articulately why that is the wrong policy to adopt.

### **The feeling the interview outcome is already known**

Do not let this effect your performance, you never know for sure what their decision will be.

### **Deciding during the course of the interview you are no longer interested in the job**

Do not get up and leave, continue with the interview as you would if you wanted the job. If there is a specific problem you have that has changed your mind discuss it, perhaps there is a way around it?

### **Seeing another interviewee who you know**

If you meet a friend in reception, exchange the time of day but do not be too chatty, in this environment they are the competition. Remain professional and wish them good luck with their interview. Interviewers are not ogres, most of the time they are not trying to catch you out they simply want to get the best personnel for their company. If you stay cool and calm and follow these guidelines you won't go far wrong.

## 20 Things not to do during an interview

If you are smartly presented, adhere to basic social etiquette and sensibly answer the interviewer's questions then you are well on your way to a new job. However there are some blunders to avoid:

1. Do not arrive late, you must allow enough time from when you leave your house to permit for unforeseen circumstances such as rail problems or traffic jams.
2. Do not fidget with items on the desk, or play with your hair and clothes.
3. Do not mumble, talk too fast, too softly or non-stop. Unless you speak clearly all of your sound comments will be lost on the interviewer and you will not impress.
4. Do not use slang words, crack silly jokes, or chew gum.
5. Do not lean on the interviewer's desk or frequently glance at your watch.
6. Do not hide any aspect of your previous record, overstate qualifications, brag, or become angry.
7. Do not call the interviewer by his/her first name, or become involved in any negative aspect of your current employer, classes, or university.
8. Do not show ignorance about the company, allow your research to come through in conversation.
9. Do not appear half-asleep, go to bed early the night before the interview and sleep soundly knowing that you are fully prepared for the day ahead.
10. Do not bring up the topic of salary. When the time is right, salary will be discussed.
11. If it is an interview over lunch do not order the spaghetti.
12. Do not come across as being passive or indifferent, be positive and enthusiastic.
13. Do not be overbearing, or conceited.
14. Be friendly and open, but do not flirt with the interviewer.
15. Do not use negative body language, or convey inappropriate aspects of your character.

## More Tough Questions And Some Possible Responses

### **Tell me about yourself?**

Impossible to answer fully! Select strengths, skills, achievements and particularly benefits to other employers' which your research shows will be of greatest interest to them. State very briefly your background and positions held. Do not speak for longer than a few minutes. Keep eye contact with your interviewer, and be sure that you have their interest.

### **What can you offer us?**

Be sure you know something about the situation you have in mind before you try to answer. Then you can relate some of your past experiences where you have succeeded in solving problems that appear similar to those of your prospective employer. You can also mention an achievement that you think will impress.

### **What are your strengths?**

You should be able to list and concisely explain 3 or 4 essential strengths that are relevant to their needs. A couple of examples of benefits to previous employers will substantiate this.

### **What have you accomplished?**

Try to pick out accomplishments that bear on the challenge you may have been discussing. Stay away from ancient times. Again substantiate with examples of savings or improvements by past employers you have worked for.

### **What are your limitations?**

Respond with a strength which, if over-done can get in your way and becomes a weakness. For example, you might say, "My ambition to get the job done sometimes causes me to press a little too hard on staff or my organisation, but I am aware of the problem and believe that I have it under control".

Alternatively, deal with your need for further training in some new aspect. *Do not claim to be flawless.*

**What are your ambitious for the future?**

Indicate your desire to concentrate on doing the immediate job well - you're confident that the future will take care of itself. You do not want to convey the idea that you have no desire to progress, but you need to avoid statements that might indicate you put your personal career before doing a good job.

**What do you know about our company?**

If you have already done your homework, you can honestly state that you have studied published information and are thus aware of the basic facts. However, you might also state that you would like to know more - and then be prepared to ask some intelligent questions.

Do not try to show off and recite all you have learned, but merely let your knowledge flow in a brief concise manner.

**Why do you want to be selected for this job?**

Indicate that, from the study of their company, many activities and problems would give you a clear chance to contribute to the company - through experience and skills. If you can honestly say so, explain your admiration for the company and what it is that impresses you.

**What do you look for from your employer?**

Keep your answer opportunity orientated. Talk about the chance you would have to perform and get recognition. How your contribution in helping to solve problems is rewarding to you.

**Do you feel you might be over qualified or too important for a small company like ours?**

A good company needs good people with the appropriate experience. Explain that you are willing to bet that your accomplishments in other companies can be repeated here.

**What is your management style?**

If you have not thought about this one...time you did. Talk about your expertise and experience. Say how you get the best out of your team, say how you enjoy helping to ensure your boss achieves his/her objectives.

**Why do you feel that you have a good potential to be picked for this job?**

Keep your answer orientated towards your past achievements and the task to be done. Explain how you go about getting work done. Be proud of your own record. **BE POSITIVE.**

**What do you see as the most difficult task in being successful?**

Getting things done, and planned on time within the budget. Ensuring the customer gets the best possible service. Stress how important customer satisfaction is to you.

**In your last company what were the things that you liked most and least?**

Be careful here. Emphasise the positive and do not carry on at length about the negatives.

**Describe a situation in which your work was criticised?**

Be specific and brief - avoid getting emotional and defensive about it. Keep to criticism from your boss - never a customer.

**How do you hold up under pressure of deadlines?**

"I can handle it; it is a way of life in the business world".

**What sort of reading do you do?**

Be honest; mention some of the things you read in order to keep yourself up-to-date in your professional field. However, it is fitting to show balanced interests by your recreational reading too.

**Do you consider yourself a creative person?**

YES (and be prepared to give a couple of examples where you have solved problems).

**How would you describe your own personality?**

Balanced and human. Mention two or three useful traits i.e. self-motivation, honest, hard working, totally reliable, integrity etc.

**What are your strongest points?**

Be ready to present at least three - preferably in a way that relates them to the potential employer.

**What sort of relationship do you have with your associates within your last company, both at the same level and above you?**

This is a very important question, and you can well afford to take your time and answer in steps. When talking about your relationships with associates, be prepared to state your philosophy of co-operation, particularly how specialists are available to help you with complex problems.

Concerning bosses, indicate your keen interest in understanding the expectations of your boss, so that you and your organisation can build your goals in a way that will support his/her goals. You may also want to talk about how you would go about keeping your boss informed. How your boss was supportive and understanding which helped you to give ongoing support to him and the team.

**What are some of your activities outside of work?**

Your answer should show that you lead a balanced life. Avoid throwing in so many outside activities that it casts some doubt on how much time you have left for your job. Remember too, that your hobbies and recreations can be quite revealing as to your own personality.

**Are you continuing your professional training?**

If you are not actually attending or planning to attend formal classes, be ready to explain what sort of outside reading (of books or magazines) or attendance at professional seminars you undertake in order to keep yourself up to date with developments in the world of IT.

**There are five other candidates waiting to be interviewed for this job. Why should I give it to you?**

A good way to respond to this is to say very clearly that you are capable of doing the job well. You might like to add that your last employer thought highly of you. This is an ideal point at which to emphasise your strengths, skills and achievements.

## Competency Based Interviews/Questions

These are also known as **skills-based, behavioural, or structured interviews** and work on the principle that:

### **PAST PERFORMANCE IS THE BEST PREDICTOR OF FUTURE PERFORMANCE.**

The interviewer will therefore be seeking examples of past behaviour that provide him/her with concrete evidence that you have the necessary competencies to succeed in the job.

#### **What happens in a situational interview?**

The interviewer will ask you a series of questions along the lines of:

Describe a situation when you .....

Give an example of a time when you .....

When you have answered these, the interviewer may prompt you for further information. When you have exhausted one topic, the interviewer will move on to the next leaving little opportunity for discussion. At the end of the interview, there may be an opportunity for you to ask your own questions. This format may seem **rigid, unnatural and unfriendly** to many interviewees but, as well as providing evidence of competencies relevant to the job, it is also seen as a **fair and equitable** method of selection since all candidates are asked exactly the same questions.

#### **What is the best way to prepare for a situational interview?**

Read the employer's brochure and/or job description, and note the skills and competencies they require.

Note down any examples you can think of when you have put these competencies into practice. These examples could come from vacation or part-time work; university clubs and societies; voluntary work; study at school or university; holidays and travel or personal and family experiences.

Compose a paragraph or so for each situation, outlining what happened, how you approached it and what the outcome was. The **"STAR"** format should help you to structure these outlines:

<b>Situation:</b>	What was the situation in which you found yourself?
<b>Task:</b>	What was the specific task which you had to achieve?
<b>Action:</b>	What action did you take?
<b>Result:</b>	What was the outcome of your action?

The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group, interviewers will want to know what was your specific role in achieving the desired result. Once you have done this, select the examples which you feel are the best illustrations of the required competence. These may be the ones that you choose to use on the application form, or else will be the first examples that you give in answer to the interview questions. Don't forget the other examples, though interviewers may sometimes probe for as many examples as possible.

#### **What if I can't think of any suitable examples?**

Try and be as open as possible, the examples you give don't have to be high-level. Planning and organising a week's independent travel in Scotland is as valid an example as a trek through the Himalayas.

If you really can't think of anything, consider how vital that competence is to the employer. If, for example, leadership is a key factor, and you have really never taken the lead in anything, are you applying for the right job? Would you be happy in it?

If there is only one area that is giving you problems of this type all may not be lost, provided that you are strong in other areas.

Examples of situational questions and answers for a Systems Analyst are below:

### COMPUTER SYSTEMS ANALYST

**A SYSTEMS ANALYST** needs to be able to COMMUNICATE complex information to the end-users of their system.

*Can you describe a situation where you have had to explain something in detail to a person or group who knew little about the subject?*

Needs good PROBLEM-SOLVING abilities.

*Can you give an example of a situation where you solved a problem in a creative way?*

Needs to be FLEXIBLE.

*Can you describe a situation, where you had begun a task involving other people and were then required to change your approach and do something in a different way?*

Needs to be INNOVATIVE.

*Can you tell me about a time when you acted to improve a process or make a system work better?*

Needs to be PERSUASIVE when presenting their solutions to clients.

*Describe a time when you had to persuade a person or a group of people to accept a decision which they were initially reluctant to consider.*

Needs to WORK IN A TEAM.

*Can you describe a situation where you have worked with a group of other people to achieve a common goal?*

Below you will find some of the more common "behavioural" or skills-based questions found on application forms, plus example answers.

These questions are usually looking for evidence of skills that need to be used in the job and often start with "**Describe a situation** where you had to ....." or "**Give an example** of when you ....".

### THE "STAR" APPROACH TO SKILLS-BASED QUESTIONS

One way of dealing with this type of question is by using the STAR approach. Star stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. It helps you to structure your answer as a mini essay. The SITUATION and TASK are usually combined to form an introduction, describing the scenario you faced. The ACTION forms the main body and should be the longest part. The RESULT is the conclusion, and, like the introduction, should be quite short.

<b>Situation</b>	When, where, with whom?
<b>Task</b>	Describe the situation or the task you were faced with
<b>Action</b>	How? What action did YOU take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution.
<b>Result</b>	What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience?

**EXAMPLE: Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task.**

**ANSWER:**

<b>Situation</b>	Whilst employed at Weaver Bros. last summer
<b>Task</b>	I was given the task of rationalising the stock control system
<b>Action</b>	I would look at factors such as when the stock was last ordered, what it was used for and how often it was used. I worked out a method of streamlining the paperwork involved in this process and redesigned the relevant forms, which I then submitted to my manager.
<b>Result</b>	My ideas were accepted and implemented and a 15% reduction in stock levels was achieved

Try to give quantifiable results if possible.

"during my time as chairman, membership rose by 20"

"we raised £200 for charity"

"my marks improved from 55% to 65%"

You can't always do this, but it gives a much better impression of your achievement.

If the result was negative, then say what you learned from the experience and what you would do differently next time.

The examples you give can be from work, study or personal life – but try to give a variety.

Don't go into too much background detail - keep to the point

Think of the most relevant examples, rather than the most "impressive". If you are asked to describe a time when you had to give a presentation in front of the public, a seminar paper which involved research and planning will carry more weight than "presenting a bouquet to the Queen when I was four years old"!

**REMEMBER THINK POSITIVE - IT IS NOT WHAT YOU HAVE NOT GOT, BUT WHAT YOU HAVE THAT THE COMPANY WILL BE INTERESTED IN.**

***THE BEST PREPARED APPLICANT USUALLY GETS THE JOB.***

**GOOD LUCK**