

## **An Interview Guide**

A job interview is an opportunity to sell yourself. How you go about this will depend on your personality and the type of role you are applying for, but some basic rules apply across the board. Please read this document. Hopefully most of it will be second nature, but it is good to remind yourself on the basics.

- Preparation
- Research
- Day of the interview and arrival
- During the interview
- General Introduction Questions
- Telephone Interviews
- Competency Based Interviewing (CBI)
- Communication
- Talking about your experience
- Questions to be prepared for
- Some questions you could prepare
- Other important notes

Before the Interview

### **Preparation:**

- Check the location before the day and explore alternative options of transport
- Read through the job specification, know where your role will fit into the organisation
- Expect the interviewer to do a CV walkthrough. Spend some time going through your CV, making sure to familiarise yourself with your previous roles and projects along with dates
- Be prepared for any technical questions that could arise from reviewing your CV

### **Research:**

Find out as much as you can about the company you are applying to; their products/services, scale, structure etc. In addition to the information your consultant will supply, there are a few other sources you can try to find this information:

- The company's website
- Annual reports (available from libraries or the company itself)
- Company directories (from the library)
- Company brochures
- LinkedIn
- Google News
- And, best of all, if you can, speak to someone who works for the company - of course, this is not always possible, but it is a very useful source of information.

### **Day of the interview and arrival:**

- Plan to arrive 10 minutes early. Always leave plenty of time. Assume you are going to be held up and check for traffic reports if necessary.
- Don't arrive *too* early. If you are more than 15 minutes early, wait outside.
- Take pen, paper etc with you
- Dress to impress - wear a suit even if the dress code of the company you're visiting is casual. Ensure your personal presentation (shoes / suit / shirt / tie / hair) is perfect.

## During the interview

Act positively and confidently. Give a firm handshake. Be prepared for different interview styles.

- Competency Based
- Panel
- Technical
- Formal / Informal

## Telephone Interviews

- As a minimum you should brush up on the company's business structure, clients, products, industry terminology, or anything else that may relate to the position you are applying for. Spending an hour or two researching these things before you do an interview, can make a great impression on your interviewers and possibly land you a second interview or even a job
- Do keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
- Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Where possible make/take the call on a landline.
- Turn call-waiting off so your call isn't interrupted.
- Make sure your phone is charged and you are in an area with reception.
- If you are asked technical questions, don't search for answers online. Aside from being dishonest your interviewer will hear you typing and assume you are cheating

## General Interview Questions

### **Q: Tell me about yourself.**

**A:** Delivering a mixture of professional and personal experiences is important. Talk about your background, interests, degree, where you lived, why you liked it and why you chose the career path you have.

Answer no longer than five minutes on this question and no less than three minutes.

### **Q: How would your friends describe you?**

**A:** Answer the question with confidence and conviction. Give an answer followed by a brief example of bullet points.

Examples – Sociable, loyal, committed, honest, fun, determined. Remember the question is "how would your friends describe you", so think about more non-work related words.

### **Q: What are your top three strengths?**

**A:** The most important question. You MUST perfect this answer.

Most people have five key strengths – select your top three. Remember it should reflect your career path, so if you are a project manager then organisational skills, collaboration, time management, stakeholder management, ability to motivate others and general communication skills are important. If you are a business analyst then communication, ability to know what is

possible and to challenge why it needs to be done, documentation skills, problem solving, ability to work well under pressure, team working skills are all important skills. Choose three, stick with it and practice delivering examples.

**Q: What is important to you in your career over the next two years?**

**A:** Know what you want from your career. For some people developing skills or achieving qualifications is important over the next two years. For others it is greater responsibility or overcoming particular challenges. Talk about growth and development and how you want this to be achieved.

Try not to talk about where you want to be in two years but rather what you would like to see happen in your career over the next two year period.

**Q: Give me one weakness you have.**

**A:** Do not give a weakness that contradicts your strengths. Not assertive, not good with confrontation, impatient – want things done right and done NOW are good examples. Remember to choose a weakness that won't give the impression your performance will be overly impacted by it. Try to follow up with examples of how you have addressed these weaknesses and tried to improve on them.

**Q: What motivates you?**

**A:** Think about why you work and why you selected your chosen career path as opposed to being a plumber or a baker - and match it against the reasons for wanting to be good at it. Some examples of drivers are financial, recognition, challenges, success, making a difference, your family, parental expectations.

'I have a young family, they motivate me to excel within my job and ultimately escalate my position. This will help me earn a greater salary and give them the best possible start I want for them.'

**Q: What do you like & dislike about your job?**

**A:** Think of two likes and dislikes. What specifically stands out for you in this job compared to previous jobs – is it the people, size, values, challenges, ability to travel, the location?

No organisation is perfect. What is it that you dislike? Is it the travel, the location, the size, the reliance on others etc.

Remember: Do not select answers which can relate to the position you are going for! Try to be pragmatic and constructive.

**Q: Where do you see you see yourself in five years' time?**

**A:** You need to know where you are going. This demonstrates focus and direction. Where will you be? The size of the company, the location, your job title, your responsibilities, will you be managing a team, how big, what industry? Be clear on this before you go to interview.

**Q: If I were to call your boss – how would they describe you?**

**A:** Compared to the friends question answered above, think of more professional adjectives such as committed, hard working, sociable, tenacious, team player, goes beyond the scope of duty, reliable, regularly exceeds expectations.

You must have examples ready for each and practice your delivery of these answers so they are structured and clear. See the STAR method of answering examples below.

## Competency Based Interviewing (CBI)

You may also be aware of the term CBI being known as behavioural based interviewing. In essence, a CBI interview is a series of scenario-based questions designed to examine your strength across a number of soft skills. The concept behind this type of question, where you are asked to give a specific example of a real-life situation in the work place, is that the interviewer is able to determine how you will behave in the future, based on how you behaved in the past.

A competency question will start with something like, “describe a situation when” OR “tell me about a time when.” It is important that you respond accordingly, with one *specific* example, rather than saying what you would, could or should do.

To prepare yourself for the competency questions you will need to read and understand the STAR method of structuring your answer; prepare examples for each of the competencies; and rehearse your answers. Remember that the word ‘WE’ should not form part of your answer, replace it with ‘I’. It’s you they want to hear about! The hiring manager after all, is looking to hire you .... Not your team!

### Important note

Substituting “WE” and “I” is important, but in the right situations. If you were managing a team, be sure to convey that. Try not to discount your ability to work as part of a team, or leading one.

## The STAR Method of answering a competency-based question

### S – Situation

- This part of your answer is to paint the picture of the scenario you are going to use and must not be any longer than one or two lines. You will not score any points for this section. Remember not to make it too technical.

### T – Task

- Again, a brief line or two is all that is needed. The task will be your objective or goal and it may also be relevant to mention here if there are any consequences attached to you not achieving it.

### A – Actions

- The crux of your answer. It is imperative that you understand how to form the actions, as a poor answer will affect the level you are marked at and may even cause you to fail.
- Actions must start with “I” and contain a specific action word – such as emailed, organised, telephoned, presented, researched, and chaired. If you ever feel yourself wanting to say “liaise” or “communicated with” – you need to break this down again – think; How did you communicate with that person, what method did you use? (Email, face-to-face or over the phone)?
- When preparing an answer, for the “communication” competency in particular, it is important to remember that the interviewer will be looking for a candidate who can do more than just send an email or chair a short meeting. The more detail the better, so be sure to state what other methods you employed. Did you verbally invite people to the meeting to create greater impact? Did you prepare side-notes, pre-meeting reading material for the attendees, a high level overview or arrange for someone neutral to come in and take minutes? After the meeting, did you email around the around the minutes, or set a short piece of research for your attendees to work on before the next meeting to ensure your message was understood loud and clear? Other things to think about could

include – size of the meeting? Tools used (video-conferencing, slides, overhead projector) and how you documented the meeting.

#### The **STAR** Method of answering a competency-based question (Cont...)

- Actions must follow in a chronological order. Once you have reached your final point – stop there! You don't want to get carried away and start talking about a different scenario.
- When preparing your answers at home, actions should read like bullet points.

#### **R – Result**

- Like the situation and task, this should be kept brief, one line.
- Try to imagine you are giving this example to your C.E.O, who would not thank you for inundating him/her with technical information. You would want to demonstrate that you have taken ownership and have the ability to articulate your course of action to achieve the desired result.

#### **Communication**

- Be aware of the tempo of the interview, if your interviewer is talking and asking questions slowly or quickly, respond in a like manner.
- Try to maintain eye contact.
- Be aware of your audience; try to gauge the understanding of the individual(s) you are meeting with. Don't become too technical and lose someone that doesn't know what you are talking about, the same applies for the reverse. Don't talk high level when you have a technical audience, they will be looking for detail.
- Try to talk the interviewer's language - if they're formal, you are formal. If they make a joke, laugh! But be careful if you want to make a joke yourself.
- If there are multiple people interviewing you, share attention between them and be sure to answer questions to the person that directed them.
- Don't talk too much - this is a difficult one, but the talking should be fairly even between interviewer and interviewee. Make sure you pause if you're in the middle of a long answer to allow the interviewer to speak if they need to.

#### **Talking about your experience**

- Use examples from your previous experience that highlight areas specified on the Job Description. Keep examples recent and relevant, from within the last five years. Use a variety of different examples, it is often seen as a weakness to use the same scenario for different questions, preparation is key.
- Think about the different interviewers motivations: an HR interviewer's main concern will be to ensure that you fit the company culture, but they will not generally be able to assess your ability to do the job. Unlike the line manager, who will be able to test your skills and will also be checking out your personality (asking questions like "Can I face working with this person on a daily basis. Will they fit in with the rest of the team").
- Listen to the questions. If you don't understand the question, ask for clarification.

#### **Talking about your experience**

- Take your time in answering a question. It's better to give a decent answer after a few seconds pause, rather than a garbled, nonsensical answer immediately.

- Don't give clichéd answers to questions ("I'm a great team player"), which you can't back up with examples from the workplace.
- Don't criticise your current employer - it'll make the interviewer question your loyalty.

**Questions to be prepared for:**

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritise your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.

**Questions to be prepared for (Cont...):**

- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- What are the reasons for leaving your last role?
- What are your expectations for your next role?
- What is your most noteworthy achievement?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- Why do you want to come to work for us?
- What do you know about this company?

- Why did you choose this career?
- What are your major strengths/weaknesses? (have at least three of each prepared with supporting evidence)
- How was your last review?
- What has been the biggest challenge in your career to date?
- How would your friends/colleagues describe you?

#### **Prepare questions to ask the interviewer**

- This is a good time to find out more about the role.
- At the end of the interview, it is fine to ask how the interviewer felt it went and when you can expect to hear from them. You should re-affirm your interest in the role and thank them for their time.
- Some questions you could prepare:
- How do you see this role developing over the next two years?
  - What are the company's growth plans?
  - What are the three most important things you are expecting this person to deliver in year one.
  - What does success look like within this role?
  - How do you like to manage?
  - What are the biggest challenges to be faced in the first six months
  - What is the company culture like?
  - What new initiatives or technologies have recently been implemented?
  - What is your policy for learning and development?

#### **Other important notes**

- Don't apologise constantly. If you're late, apologise once. If you don't know something, don't apologise, answer by explaining how you would go about finding the answer.
- If you have more than one interview, remember what you have said to each interviewer. It's fine to duplicate information across the interviews, but make sure you don't repeat yourself to the same person. Sometimes interviewers may have a short chat between interviews and the second interviewer may be given the task of probing a particular area, so expect some repetition.
- Never say negative things about your current employer or reasons for leaving. Try to keep this brief, and professional. Focus on the future, not on the past.
- Always call your agent after the interview with feedback.
- Never ask about remuneration. Your agent will handle this. If you are asked, feel free to answer appropriately if confident, or say you would rather they spoke to the agent on that topic.