**THE STAR INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE**

1. **What is the STAR interview technique?**

Most job interviews have a segment for competency or behavioural questions. Hiring managers use these questions to assess an applicant's experience and qualities. These types of questions are designed to prompt a story-like response from the applicants. Successful candidates know and use the STAR technique, a proven method of answering tricky situational questions systematically while providing all the essential details.

**The STAR technique is a method of answering questions that is comprised of four steps**:

**Situation**: Describe the situation and when it took place.

**Task**: Explain: Explain the task and what was the goal.

**Action**: Provide details about the action you took to attain this.

**Result**: Conclude with the result of your action.

**The STAR method lets you create a simple and easy-to-follow story that brings out the difficult situation and resolution. Here's a breakdown of what each of the four parts of the technique mean:**

**Situation**

Set the scene of the story by giving a context and the background of the situation. If you're asked about teamwork, your response should include the project details, who you were collaborating with, when you undertook the project and your location at that time.

**Task**

Describe your exact role or responsibility in the situation. Make sure that the hiring manager knows what you were specifically assigned to do, rather than what everyone did.

**Action**

This step is probably the most important part of the story. Here, you explain how you handled the difficult situation or conquered the problem. Say whether you did it alone or together as a team. What you're trying to communicate is your assessment of the situation and your response to the problem as well as how you got the team involved.

*Share as many details as possible so the interviewer can follow you. As you do so, avoid acronyms and company-specific jargon.*

**Result**

Close the story by stating the positive outcome of your actions and what lessons you learned. If possible, quantify the results and show the effects of your actions. Examples may include a 10% increase in sales, getting repeat business or saving your team five hours of work in a week.

1. **Which questions need a STAR response?**

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| Typical competency-based interview questions generally start by asking about a time you demonstrated one of the competencies listed in the job description. For this reason, it's advisable to familiarise yourself with the job description before your interview to be prepared for these questions. Most graduate job interviews ask about soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and negotiation. Many of the questions require you to recount past work experiences. If you are applying for an apprenticeship or internship or have little work experience, talk about extra-curricular activities and your achievements or school projects you've done. |

1. **How to prepare for a behavioural interview?**

Here are some steps you can take to ready yourself for the interview portion of the hiring process:

1. Recall the latest situations you've been in that demonstrate positive behaviours or decisive actions, especially involving work experience, team effort, leadership, initiative and service delivery.
2. Create short descriptions for each situation and be prepared to share the details if asked.
3. Make sure the story has a beginning, middle and conclusion. Be prepared to describe the situation, task at hand, the action you took and the result.
4. Be forthright in your responses. Avoid embellishing or omitting any important parts of the story. It is likely that the interviewer has conducted enough behavioural interviews to know when someone's being honest.
5. Ensure that the outcome reflects positively on you even if the result was not favourable.
6. Be specific about events and give a detailed account of what happened, avoiding generalising.
7. Provide various examples, and don't recount the same situation over multiple questions.
8. **Example of STAR interview questions**

Here are some examples of behavioural questions the hiring manager may ask you:

* Describe a time when you faced a difficult moment at work. How did you sort the problem?
* Tell me about a time you were under immense pressure at the workplace. How did you handle it?
* Share about a mistake you made at work. What did you do about it?
* Explain a situation where you used data or logic to make a recommendation.
* Tell me about a difficult decision you made at work. What did you do?
* Describe a time when you disagreed with your boss. How did you resolve it?
* Tell me about a situation you had to make a split-second decision. How did you do it?
* Explain a time you had to break some bad news. How did you do it?
* Tell me about a time you worked with another department on a joint project. What did you do?
* Share about a time you set a specific goal and achieved it.
* Tell me about a time you failed. What lessons did you learn?

1. **How to answer an interview question using the STAR technique (with examples)**

Though you never know what questions the interviewer will ask, most behavioural interviews tend to focus on workplace challenges. The interviewee is expected to demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, the ability to work under pressure, conflict resolution and experience in leadership situations that require leadership.

As part of the interview preparation, review the job details and the desired skills and figure out the type of challenges that may arise or obstacles you must overcome. Next, list the various situations you've tackled in your employment history that you feel demonstrate the strengths you need to excel in the new position.

Regardless of what stories you choose to share, ensure that you define the **situation, task, action,** and **result** and that your answers relate to the skills and competencies asked for in the job posting.

**Here are two examples of how to answer behavioural interview questions using the STAR technique:**

**Describe a time when you handled a difficult situation at work. How did you react?**

'In my last job as a night nurse, one of my colleagues quit after securing a job with a top private hospital. Though I was managing a ward full of patients, I was assigned a patient who didn't want to be admitted. He wanted to bolt out of his room. I made myself available to the patient, discussed with him the reason he was being admitted and assured him he would receive 24/7 attention and good care. The patient finally calmed down and agreed to spend the next three days under observation. He was discharged on the third day and his wife personally thanked me for handling someone she knew to be extremely stubborn and difficult.'

### Tell me about a recent mistake you made. How did you handle it?

'I was the assistant property manager of a real estate firm, and I was responsible for arranging a home viewing. One lady liked the house that was vacant. She paid the deposit and said she would be moving in two days' time. Unfortunately, I didn't book her, and I assigned the same house to another tenant. I realised the mistake on the day she was supposed to move in. I rushed to the apartment block and found another apartment with faulty lighting. I called the local electrician to fix the problem and ensured the house was cleaned up properly.'

'I called the lady and explained that there was a mix-up. After apologising, I asked her if she could move into another apartment that was just as spacious as the one, she had booked. Lucky for me, she didn't object. I told my boss, and he was pleased that I acted fast. I have been extra careful to record important details, and I have never made that mistake again'.

The STAR response method is a great way to create brief but compelling answers to behavioural interview questions. Make sure you provide honest answers and share positive results. A good way of practising is by writing down the stories and reading them out loud. Where necessary, trim the stories so they are clear and concise. Try to draw from your latest five work experiences or employment history, unless you feel there's an older anecdote that better captures what the interviewing panel may be looking for in their ideal candidate.