

A Guide to Competency Based Questions

Interviewing a candidate using competency based questions is fast becoming the chosen method for a number of our clients. Because of this reason you should always be prepared for an interview which may include competency questions.

To answer a competency-based question you will be required to draw on specific past experiences/incidents that demonstrate how competent you are in handling this type of event. When using competency based interviewing the interviewer will be looking for your answers to be as specific as possible to this one instance and not a general answer as to what you would have done.

There is a common technique to help you put together your answers when competency based questions are being used. This is known as the STAR method.

Situation – Outline the background to the **Situation**

Task – Describe your designated **responsibility/Task** within this Situation

Action – What **Action** you personally took

Result – The outcome/**Result** based on your own Actions

Examples of how a Competency Based Question will start are:

Tell me about a time when you....
Give an example of a situation where....
Describe a scenario....

Some examples of commonly used competency questions are:

Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly?
Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with?
What achievement are you most proud of?
Give me an example of a time when you have had to achieve a specific result
What opportunities have you identified and used to achieve success?
Tell me about a time when you have 'made things happen' for yourself/your team?
Can you please give a specific example of when you have had to influence a colleague to your way of thinking?
Can you give us an example of when you have dealt with an upset or angry customer in the past?
What skills and personal qualities have you contributed to the teams you have been part of?
Tell me about the most difficult person you have worked with.
Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made.

Be sure to always start your answer with 'I....' not 'We....' Where you are able you should also indicate an area of your CV which backs this up, for example "During my time with XYZ Ltd I....."

The interviewer will put together a list of questions dependant on the role you are interviewing for. They will want to know specific examples of when you have been in this situation to assess your competence in handling this event again in the future.

Think of the role you are about to be interviewed for, what would you say would be the top 3 competencies from the list below that would be important?

- *Communication skills*
- *Delivering Results*
- *Interpersonal Skills*
- *Use of Initiative*
- *Planning and Organising*

- *Analytical Thinking*
- *Strategic Thinking*
- *Building relationships*
- *Developing Others*
- *Team Work*

Mixed in with a competency based interview will be standard questions which any company will ask during an interview. Be sure to listen as to how the questions are worded and whether you should be answering with a competency answer or a standard interview answer.

Examples of standard interview questions are:

What are your future career goals?

Why do you want to work for our company?

What interests you about our company?

Of your previous jobs, which did you enjoy most and why?

What are your weaknesses? (Be sure not to state anything which is listed in the Job Spec)

What are your strengths? (Make sure you match your strengths to the role you are being interviewed for)

What style of management gets the best results from you?

What have been your major achievements to date?

Why are you looking to leave your current role? (Be sure not to be negative when speaking of any previous employer)

In summary, as with every interview, you need to be fully prepared. It's a fact that many excellent candidates answer relatively simple competency based questions poorly and as a result lose out on that perfect job offer. Read your CV, and then read it again. Know your strengths and use them to your advantage.