Interview Q&A

## Tell me about a time you had to complete a task within a tight deadline. Describe the situation and explain how you handled it.

While I typically like to plan out my work in stages and complete it piece by piece, I can also achieve high-quality work results under tight deadlines. Once, at a former company, an employee left days before the deadline of one of his projects. I was asked to assume responsibility for it, with only a few days to learn about and complete the project. I created a task force and delegated work, and we all completed the assignment with a day to spare. In fact, I believe I thrive when working under tight deadlines.

## What do you do when a team member doesn't complete their share of the work?

When there are team conflicts or issues, I always try my best to step up as team leader if needed. I think my communication skills make me an effective leader and moderator. For example, one time, when I was working on a team project, two of the team members got embroiled in an argument, both refusing to complete their assignments. They were both dissatisfied with their workloads, so I arranged a team meeting in which we reallocated all the assignments among the team members. This made everyone happier and more productive, and our project was a success.

## Tell me about a time you showed initiative on the job.

Last winter,I was acting as an account coordinator, supporting the account executive for a major client at an ad agency. The account executive had an accident and was sidelined three weeks before a major campaign pitch.

I volunteered to fill in and orchestrate the presentation by coordinating the input of the creative and media teams. I called an emergency meeting and facilitated a discussion about ad scenarios, media plans, and the roles of various team members in relation to the presentation.

I was able to achieve a consensus on two priority ad concepts that we had to pitch and on related media strategies. I drew up a minute-by-minute plan of how we would present the pitch. Based on our discussions, the plan was warmly received by the team. The client loved our plan and adopted the campaign. I was promoted to account executive six months later.

## Tell me about yourself.

Well, I’m currently an account executive at Smith, where I handle our top-performing client. Before that, I worked at an agency where I was on three different major national healthcare brands. And while I really enjoyed the work that I did, I’d love the chance to dig in much deeper with one specific healthcare company, which is why I’m so excited about this opportunity with Metro Health Center.

## Why do you want to work at this company?

I saw on The Muse that you were also hiring for new positions on the West Coast to support your new operations there. I did some more reading about the new data center you’re building there and that excites me as I know this means there’ll be opportunities to train new teammates. I also learned through a Wall Street Journal article that you’re expanding in Mexico as well. I speak Spanish fluently and would be eager to step up and help liaise whenever necessary.

## Why do you want this job?

I’ve always been a fan of X Co’s products and I’ve spent countless hours playing your games. I know that your focus on unique stories is what drew me and other fans into your games initially and keeps us coming back for more. I’ve followed X Co on social media for a while, and I’ve always loved how you have people in different departments interact with users. So I was psyched when I came across this posting for a social media manager with TikTok experience. At my last job, I was responsible for launching our TikTok account and growing it to 10,000 followers in six months. Between that experience, my love of gaming, and my deep knowledge of your games and fanbase, I know I could make this TikTok account something special and exciting.

## What are your greatest strengths?

I’d say one of my greatest strengths is bringing organization to hectic environments and implementing processes to make everyone’s lives easier. In my current role as an executive assistant to a CEO, I created new processes for pretty much everything, from scheduling meetings to planning monthly all hands agendas to preparing for event appearances. Everyone in the company knew how things worked and how long they would take, and the structures helped alleviate stress and set expectations on all sides. I’d be excited to bring that same approach to an operations manager role at a startup, where everything is new and constantly growing and could use just the right amount of structure to keep things running smoothly.

## What do you consider to be your weaknesses?

It can be difficult for me to gauge when the people I’m working with are overwhelmed or dissatisfied with their workloads. To ensure that I’m not asking too much or too little from my team, we have weekly check-ins. I like to ask if they feel like they’re on top of their workload, how I could better support them, whether there’s anything they’d like to take on or get rid of, and if they’re engaged by what they’re doing. Even if the answer is ‘all good,’ these meetings really lay the groundwork for a good and trusting relationship.

## Tell me about a challenge or conflict you’ve faced at work, and how you dealt with it.

Funnily enough, last year I was part of a committee that put together a training on conflict intervention in the workplace and the amount of pushback we got for requiring attendance really put our training to the test. There was one senior staff member in particular who seemed adamant. It took some careful listening to understand he felt like it wasn’t the best use of his time given the workload he was juggling. I made sure to acknowledge his concern. And then I focused on his direct objection and explained how the training was meant to improve not just the culture of the company, but also the efficiency at which we operated—and that the goal was for the training to make everyone’s workload feel lighter. He did eventually attend and was there when I talked to the whole staff about identifying the root issue of a conflict and addressing that directly without bringing in other issues, which is how I aim to handle any disagreement in the workplace.

## What is your greatest professional achievement?

My greatest accomplishment was when I helped the street lighting company I worked for convince the small town of Bend, Oregon to convert antiquated street lighting to energy-efficient LED bulbs. My role was created to promote and sell the energy-efficient bulbs, while touting the long-term advantage of reduced energy costs. I had to develop a way to educate city light officials on the value of our energy-efficient bulbs—which was a challenge since our products had an expensive up-front cost compared to less efficient lighting options. I created an information packet and held local community events aimed at city officials and the tax-paying public. There, I was able to demo the company product, answer questions, and evangelize the value of LED bulbs for the long term. It was crucial to have the public on board and I was able to reach a wide variety of community members with these events. I not only reached my first-year sales goal of $100,000, but I was also able to help us land another contract in a neighboring city. Plus, the community-focused strategy garnered attention from the national media. And I’m proud to say I got a promotion within one year to senior sales representative.

## Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills.

I think that a good leader is someone who can make decisions while also listening to others and being willing to admit when you’re wrong and course correct. In my last role, my team and I were responsible for giving a big presentation to a prospective client. I quickly assigned different tasks to members of my team, but the project never really got moving. I gave everyone an opportunity to share their input and concerns, and it turned out that they were struggling in the roles I’d given them. I ended up switching a few people around. Meanwhile, the employee I’d assigned to give the presentation was nervous, but still wanted to give it a try. I worked with them to make sure they were ready and even held a practice session so that they could rehearse in a more comfortable environment. When the time came for the real thing, they nailed it! We landed the client and the company still has the account to this day. And that employee became a go-to person for important client presentations. I’m really glad I took the time to listen to everyone’s concerns so that I could re-evaluate my approach and help my team be the best it could be.

## Why are you leaving your current job?

I’m ready for the next challenge in my career. I loved the people I worked with and the projects I worked on, but at some point I realized I wasn’t being challenged the way I used to be. Rather than let myself get too comfortable, I decided to pursue a position where I can continue to grow.

## Can you explain why you changed career paths?

Ever since my brother was diagnosed with a heart condition, I’ve been training and running with him in your annual Heart Run to raise money for your organization and help support patients with expenses not covered by insurance. Each time, I’ve been struck by how truly dedicated and happy to be there your employees have been. So when I saw this posting for a fundraising role, it felt like it was meant to be. For the last 10 years of my career I’ve been an account executive for various SaaS companies, and I’ve really honed my skills when it comes to convincing organizations to make regular payments for something over the long-term. But I’ve been looking for a position in fundraising where I can use these skills to really help people and I’m highly motivated to do that with your organization.

## How would your boss and coworkers describe you?

Actually, in my most recent performance review in April, my direct supervisor described me as someone who takes initiative and doesn’t shy away from hard problems. My role involves a lot of on-site implementation, and when things go wrong, it’s usually up to me to fix it. Rather than punting the problem back to the team, I always try to do what I can first. I know she appreciates that about me.

## How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?

I stay motivated by thinking about the end result. I’ve found that even in the midst of a challenging situation, reminding myself of my goals helps me take a step back and stay positive.

## What motivates you?

I’m driven primarily by my desire to learn new things—big or small—and take on new responsibilities so that I’m constantly growing as an employee and contributing more to my team and organization. I spent several summers working as a camp counselor and felt most fulfilled when I volunteered to lead planning for a talent show, jumped in to help with scheduling logistics, and learned how to run pickups efficiently. All of that experience helped immensely when I took a step up to become the lead counselor last year focused on operations, and that’s what excites me so much about the opportunity to take on this managerial role for the after-school program.

## Where do you see yourself in five years?

In five years, I’d like to be in a position where I know more about my longer-term career aspirations as a designer. I will have gotten experience working for a design agency and know more about the industry overall. I’ll have grown my technical skills and learned how to take feedback from clients and incorporate it. And the way your agency is set up, I’ll also have gotten the opportunity to design different kinds of deliverables—including websites, branding, and ad campaigns—for different kinds of clients to see where I really feel at home before settling on a focus.

Questions: 1. Walk me through your professional background.

I went to school at CSUF where I received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry. My studies emphasized quantitative analysis as a priority. I did my research project on the effects of a highway on the soil and ground water on plants and trees in an adjacent arboretum. I am currently working in the pharmaceutical industry as a QC chemist and have been doing that for the last 3 years. I test products for chemical composition using different analytical techniques; and the data we collect is evaluated using different regression models with emphasis on R-Squared and mean squared error metrics. From my experiences, I found that I excelled most when working with data rather than working in a laboratory setting. So, I decided to take a 6-month intensive course on Springboard, where the focus was on data science and machine learning. I created a Tensorflow.keras model that was able to categorize brain tumors based on 3064 MRI images and masks. The model used an Artificial Neural Network (ANN) called ResNet to train on the images. While I have learned a lot from my past career and education, I would like to expand my knowledge by working for a company like yours.

## 2. Tell me about a professional success.

At a previous job, we had an upcoming laboratory audit from a client that sells our products. The audit was to occur with less than a weeks’ notice and we were asked to have ready archived data of our clean water systems used in our products prior to the audit happening. I was tasked to lead this project and provide data as far back as 2017. At the time, we had no system in place to easily retrieve and organize the data. All of the data was written on paper and in boxes. So, I collected the boxes and created a system of making digital copies of the data, creating a spreadsheet to inventory all the files and extracting the results on a monthly basis into an easily accessible and interpretable format. Going through the data was the hard part; so, I recruited a few colleagues to delegate some work to that they could do in their down time. While the boxes were labeled with dates, extracting the results into a data table took the most time. It took 3 days to go through all of the data, but with the help of my team, I was able to finish the project with a day to spare; which was spent reviewing the files to assure that everything was ready for the audit. From what I know, they still use the system to this day.

## 3. Tell me about a time when you failed.

To me, failure is when I do something not to the best of my ability. About 6 years ago, I was a QA specialist at a food manufacturing company. My manager asked me to produce and provide up to date and reviewed copies of CoAs, compliance, SDSs and other documents to several of our clients. At the time, I had thought that it would be a simple task and told him that I’d have it in a couple of days. I procrastinated the task and focused more on my daily tasks. By the time I got around to it, I found that a lot of the documents that we had were out of date, incomplete or just plain missing. My boss was not happy that I did not meet the deadline that I set and made clients wait longer than he told them. I should not have underestimated the task/time it would take to finish the job. Looking back, I realized that I should not have procrastinated on this project, no matter how simple it seemed. Luckily for me, my partner had a light workload and was able to help me update all of the documents and get them out to the clients by the next day. It was a great lesson for me in prioritization and keeping my word.

## 4. Tell me about a time when you’ve worked against a deadline.

While I typically like to plan out my work in stages and complete it piece by piece, I can also achieve high-quality work results under tight deadlines. One time one of my coworkers quit in the middle of the week. I think he had this planned ahead of time, because none of his weekly work was done. Some of his work was able to be delegated to others on the team, but I was tasked with working on his weekly study of stability samples. We store samples of products that we have out on the market and keep constant observations on them to ensure that they stay stable. We use this data to research the effects of time, relative humidity and temperature on our products and assign future products’ expiration dates. It is important that this testing is done on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. At this specific time, no data was collected and no samples were tested for that week. I had to add this to my own workload. I used my past experience with prioritization and created a timeline in which I was able to complete all of my work and his project. To ease the stress of the tight deadline, I started by working on the most important thing and then prioritizing tasks from easiest, or fastest to complete, to hardest/longest to complete.

5. Tell me about a project that involved a significant amount of collaboration with others. At my current job, I work as a part of a companywide safety team. We gather weekly to discuss safety issues we observe and brainstorm solutions to forward to upper management. I have been on this team for the past year and have become quite accustomed to everyone’s work styles. Sometimes we have disagreements, but we all try to maintain professionalism when it comes to each other’s concerns. There was a time when a new guy joined our group from a different department, the person previously in his position had recently left the company. He was newer to the company, so I knew he hadn’t learned the structure of how our group works yet. I like to keep things organized and a little more lighthearted so that the group doesn’t get too stressed out, but he was very disorganized and tended to take things very personally. We, as a group, had decided that it would be best for the company and our colleagues’ safety to do a monthly inspection of each of our department’s work areas. Some of the tasks on the monthly inspection was to go around each of our departments and find any safety issues, damages, messes, expired chemicals, uncontrolled documents, etc. and have them resolves; either by fixing the issues or removing them completely. The new guy seemed to be a little unhappy and stressed out. Saying that many of those issues should be worked on by the person who last used that area, not by him. He’s already too busy and did not want to add another task to his workload. I spoke with him to try to ease his anxiety and to try to work something out with him. I told him that I agreed with him, that those issues should be solved by the people who cause the issue or last used the area, but sometimes things happen and things get left out or a mess is overlooked. It is not necessarily his job to clean or fix those things, but he could just keep an eye out for those problems and if he has time tend to them, otherwise, as his department’s assigned safety inspector, he has the power to delegate those issues to others. Everyone agreed with me, saying that he’s not there to be a custodian or maintenance guy; rather he’s there to keep the area clean and safe for everyone. He seemed much more at ease after hearing these things and we set the plan in motion and generated checklists for each department to use as a monthly inspection.

## 6. What weaknesses or areas for development do you have?

I have a tendency to bite off more than I can chew when it comes to requests from other people. When I was working at a different pharmaceutical company than the one I’m working at now, I would often accept requests from my manager without thought. There was a time when I was asked to test a high priority sample, which I gladly took, excited to be given more responsibility. I was so eager to take on the project, I didn’t think of the amount of time it would take away from my current project and daily tasks. It wasn’t until after that I was able to realize that I had more on my plate than I could handle. I started to panic a little, running around the lab trying to do multiple things at once. I was clearly in over my head. A colleague of mine saw how busy I was and offered to help. At first, I was a little hesitant to accept as I didn’t want to look like I couldn’t handle it, but I agreed to her helping as I knew I would be able to get it done by myself. She started helping by gathering all the materials I would need to run both projects at the same time, which helped me tremendously and guided me on how to set up the instrument for the test. We were able to get the tests to run and I was able to continue my daily tasks as well. She asked me why I felt the need to accept the task as she was not busy and could have done it. I learned two things that day. 1. If there is an assignment I want to take on, I should check and see if I have the time and ability to do it, and 2. There is nothing wrong with asking for help.

## 7. Optional (time permitting): What strengths do you bring to this (fictional) role?

I really love to learn. I find so much satisfaction in not knowing how to do something, learning how to do it, and then outputting strong results. While I didn’t get the best grades in school, I always attended classes and loved reading about new subjects. This is even more true for my professional life. I am always excited when I am assigned a new project to work on. Adding one more skill or a little more knowledge to my brain. At any one time, I have a few hobbies going on at home. Let it be Muay Thai, dance choreography, rock climbing, and many more. I think that my eagerness to learn is one of my strongest attributes and this is why I think data science and this company is right for me.