

WEEK SEVEN



IMPORTANT!

Before we get to the questions, there's something I should remind you. When it's time for the real interview, you have to do some research before you prepare.

What do I mean by research? Well, research the company! **Learn as much as you can about the employer before the interview.** Open the company website and look for their mission statement, previous projects, companies they've partnered with in the past, and any other **indicators of their values.** Another great idea is to follow the company on all social medias, so you can get a **better understanding of the company culture.** But don't focus only on the company, you also need to check the profiles of their employees, so you can get a better idea of how they dress, how they behave online, the projects they've done and maybe even their views and opinions on the company! If you know the name of the people who are going to interview you, it's essential that you look them up!

The whole point here is to prepare yourself in order to **show you are a good fit for the company.** But remember, you have to be a good fit not only for the company, but also for the role. So, you also have to research the job!

Go over every detail in the job listing and match your skills and qualifications to the company's needs. And how do you do that? Well, all you need to do is highlight every keyword you can find, when they describe the requirements for the application. By doing that, you can better select the stories you're going to share, as well as prepare to **emphasize the key elements** they're looking for.

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EMPHASIZING KEY ELEMENTS

So far, you've been focused on learning the best ways to share your stories. And now that you are well versed on story-telling, it's time to dig a little deeper and understand how to **better emphasize the qualities of the soft skills** you are trying to portray in each of your answers.

Specially now that you've already prepared the best stories to share, you might be struggling with creating new stories for the other categories. Seeing that, I decided to create a more detailed guideline of **the most important attributes to show in each of the categories**, to make it easier for you.

However, you need to read the guidelines cautiously. You need to **share stories that highlight actual things that you do**. Stories that show what you are best at. Don't just memorize the attributes, sharing a list is never a good idea. So, select the attributes that fit with your stories. For the interviewers to remember you and take you seriously, you need to highlight these key elements **inside** your story. And you always need to make sure that you are the one responsible for those elements, not the company or your team.

Now, I know I've said this before, but it's always nice to mention that you don't need to follow these examples or guidelines, you can always change your answer to something that you find more appropriate. However, at least consider using the topics mentioned and studied.

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TIME MANAGEMENT

What are the Time Management Skills?

Having good time management skills **does NOT mean** that you're able to work fast or that you finish everything on time!!!

Yes, saving time is basically the key of this skill, but you cannot stop there! Really having time management skills means that you're not only capable of managing your own time, but you can manage it efficiently according to your whole team! This is especially necessary if you're in a leadership position.

And how exactly can someone manage time in a project that involves many people? You probably already know this, but you might not know how to exactly point out the specifics, so here we go:

Usually, you guys start these answers by saying that first you analyze the situation. That is not wrong, that is the first step. But you need to say your intentions when analyzing. What exactly are the topics you're "analyzing"?

1) The first step of successfully analyzing a situation is to **prioritize!** But again, you cannot just say that word, you need to explain what "prioritize" means to you. What topics do you consider important to prioritize?

Prioritizing does not mean identifying what is most important, and what is not. Prioritizing is a very difficult process in which you need to **identify, in each step of your process, the levels of Importance and Urgency.** And each step has different levels of each. Sometimes some things aren't important at all, but understanding that they're urgent and you need to focus on them in the beginning, can save a lot of time!

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2) And what is the first thing you do after assessing how important and urgent each step is?? Well, you **create a schedule**, of course...

This one is more specific to your liking. Everyone creates schedules in different ways, the important part is that you explain how you decide to organize everything, and why!

The best explanations involving scheduling, take into account **understanding the workflow of your team!**

And how exactly can you explain that you take the workflow into account? Well, you need to explain that you try to **understand the moments you and your team are more productive**, and when you are not. Creating your schedule taking into account how tired people will be depending on the tasks they have to do in each moment, is crucial!

If you are interviewing for a leadership position, it might also be nice to mention that **scheduling is a great way of avoiding procrastination!** However, if you are not interviewing for a leadership position, **do NOT say anything about having to deal with procrastination!!** It would sound like you need help to feel energized and do your job...

The last thing that is really interesting about creating schedules, is **setting milestones!** It's really important to break down your goal, especially in really long projects... So, showing that you can set different goals, for short and long term, is essential for showing your scheduling abilities...

3) After prioritizing and scheduling, which are abilities more focused on the long term, you need to **organize your daily activities**, so you can reach the goals you have set with the previous steps.

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What is the best way to keep yourself focused on your daily tasks? **To-do lists...**

It is not coincidence that this is the third step. You need to say that **you use the previous steps in order to create a proper to-do list!** It's important that they always stay realistic to your goals and what you can achieve, planning too much for your day is just as bad as planning too little.

In this step, it's really **important that you keep things realistic!** Working overtime, working on holidays, doing many things in your day may be interesting in the short term, and may be necessary sometimes. But if you keep doing this for a long time, you will be so tired, that your productivity would actually decrease... So, again, don't be a hero! Be a team player!

4) And, on that note, the last step is: show that **you value the importance of delegation!** Especially if in a leadership position!

We have this desire to be heroes, but that's not what companies need... When a person tries to do too much, and ends up failing, this costs a lot of money for the company...

If you're in a leadership position, focus on the fact that you understand your team and their abilities, and always try to divide the workload accordingly, never pushing someone to their limits...

If you're not in a leadership position, this can be explained in a way of **collaboration!** You need to say that when you feel that you have too much on your plate – or that you don't have enough time to do something – you are able to assess that really early, and that you ask for help (again, as soon as possible). This works the other way around too. You should say that you're constantly checking with your team to see if anyone needs help with something, so you can help them whenever possible.

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Here's a list of possible **Time Management** questions:

Describe a long-term project you managed. How did you make sure everything was running smoothly?

Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish tasks under a tight deadline.

Give me an example of when your superior gave you too much work with not enough time, and how did you handle it?

Sometimes, it's almost impossible to get everything done on your to-do list. What do you do when your list of responsibilities becomes overwhelming?

Tell me about a time you set a personal goal for yourself. How did you ensure you would meet your objectives and what steps did you take?

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COMMUNICATION

After talking to you guys, I can say for sure that everyone on this course understands the importance of good communication. But also, most of you didn't know how to say you have this skill... You keep focusing on why it's important and that you always try to maintain good communication with everyone, but you don't emphasize on what you think "good communication" actually is...

So, technically there are different emphases when dealing with this kind of question. This question can be used to try and understand **how you would resolve a conflict amongst coworkers**, or even your boss; **how you deal with your coworkers on a daily basis**; and **how you stand up for yourself**, that is, how you express yourself and your ideas...

So, in the first scenario, like in the question "How do you handle disagreements with your colleagues?", it might not have occurred to you, but the most important quality someone who has these skills would show is not talking, but **LISTENING!**

1) Yes, it's crucial that you listen! And that has to be **the number one thing that you do!** You can't assess any situation without information, so the first thing you should mention in your answer is your active **listening skills**.

2) The next quality of a person with this skill, is **showing empathy and respect!** These qualities might seem obvious, but pointing out that you care about other people's opinions, expectations, wants, etc. is really important.

3) And on another perspective, talking about communication in a different way, not for solving conflicts nor for maintaining a good relationship with coworkers, but for **sharing your ideas and opinions**, in questions like: "Tell me

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about a time when you successfully persuaded someone to see things your way at work.” For this side, you need to show a different quality that someone with this skill has: **CONFIDENCE!**

Okay, but how can you do that? Showing that you’re confident is excellent, but showing that you’re over-confident, is TERRIBLE... So, how do you do that in a good way? Well, basically, what you need to do is **focus on the fact that you love sharing your ideas**, and that you’re not afraid of what people might think even if you say something stupid. You’re not afraid of making mistakes or saying something wrong, because even if you do say something wrong, at least in the end you will have learned something.

You need to say that you have the confidence to defend what you believe, **whilst also keeping an open-mind to receive feedback**, to listen to disagreements, and to have your ideas shut down without feeling anger or compromising the team in any way!

So there, this is the difference between healthy confidence and overpowering confidence.

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Here's a list of possible **Communication** questions:

What would you do if you misunderstood an important task on the job? Give me an example.

Have you ever had to work under someone who wasn't very good at communicating? What happened?

Can you tell me about a time you gave a presentation that was particularly successful? Why do you think it went well?

How do you handle disagreements with your colleagues?

Tell me about a time when you successfully persuaded someone to see things your way at work.

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TEAMWORK

Well, it's impossible to talk about Teamwork skills without also talking about **Communication and Time Management**. They are connected, so, even if you had already talked about them, you will need to bring them up again.

With your Communication Skills (**Active listening; Empathy; and Respect**) you can explain how you can **follow instructions, mediate conflicts, develop consensus, encourage people to share their opinions, etc.**

And with your Time Management Skills (**Prioritizing; Scheduling for the long and short-term; and Delegating**) you can explain how you can **improve productivity!**

I know you know, but it's important to remember: in this category, **never focus too much on your individual successes!** The teamwork category IS NOT the category to share a story of how you were the super hero and saved a team that was doing everything wrong! Being a good team member does not mean taking leadership, you should also show that you can follow, that you can listen!

You should **never say anything bad about your coworkers**. Never! Not in this category, and not in any other! If, in your story, you have to say that someone made a mistake, you need to say it **showing a lot of respect!** And don't ever judge that person!

And not only is it important to not judge anyone, someone who has teamwork skills also knows how important it is to **recognize people's achievements!** Even more in a leadership position: Positive Reinforcement is one of the best ways of improving productivity!

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Here's a list of possible **Teamwork** questions:

Tell me about a time when you had to work with someone completely different from you. How did you adapt to collaborate better?

Give me an example of a time you had a conflict with one of your fellow team members. How did you handle it?

What do you do when your team member refuses to, or just can't complete their part of the work? Give me an example.

Are you better at working with a team or working on your own?

Describe a time when you had to motivate coworkers.

What role do you assume when you work within a team?

Tell me about a time when you failed in a team project, and how you overcame it.

What's the best idea you've come up with on a team-based project?

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PERSONAL STRESS

A lot of people answer this category saying that it's important to keep calm, and analyze the situations. But that's a general response.

Everyone feels stress. That's a fact! **You CAN'T say that you're a really stressed person**, or that stress affects you too much, but it's also NOT a good idea to say that you never get stressed. It's literally impossible. So, don't lie. Sometimes there's a lot of work to do, and **saying that you never feel stress** (contrary to what you might believe) **is not what the interviewer wants to hear...**

Yes, it's important to keep calm. But again, everybody knows that... What the interviewer wants to know is **if you are prepared to deal with situations like this**. What do you do to prevent a stressful situation from affecting your performance? Do you understand how stress affects you individually? Do you know the best way to manage these situations effectively? Do you know how to manage the stress of your team? Do you know how to anticipate it?

Well, to answer this category, it is really important to share a story. Only in a story can you really show someone how you handle these situations... And that really helps! You need to select a story in which your actions generated a **more productive environment as a result!** (Remember to use the STAR Method)

The best answers are the ones that show that **a little stress**, combined with good preparation, empathic leadership and appropriate scheduling, **can be a powerful motivator!**

You've probably noticed, but these qualities are also the ones showed in the **Time Management skills...** So, yeah, it is a good idea to answer this question mentioning your time management soft skills. Managing time is very important in stressful situations, and is key to having good productivity, which, in the end, is what this category is really all about...

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Here's a list of possible **Personal Stress** questions:

Tell me about a time when you worked well under pressure.

Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a supervisor.

What is the most difficult / challenging situation you've ever had to resolve in the workplace?

Tell me a time when you had to work unexpectedly on your own.

How do you handle unexpected changes or challenges?

Describe a time when you faced a block at work and how you solved it.

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ADAPTABILITY / PROBLEM-SOLVING

First, you need to understand something: the interviewer is asking this question trying to analyze if you can solve a problem they might find in the future. They will probably not ask about the situation specifically, but they have a situation in mind... So, it's your job to show them your problem-solving skills, not just share a technical problem you had and how you solved it.

Simply put, problem-solving skills are focused on 2 things: **quickly identifying the issue; and quickly finding a solution!**

1) Before you go around trying to fix the problem, it's extremely important to **completely assess it**, completely understand its origin and its consequences, in order to avoid making the problem even bigger. (And yes, you need to say that in your answer)

So, you need to select a story to tell, and in that story, you need to **contextualize what caused the problem** (if it was a coworker, be careful not to assign too much blame).

2) The next process after identifying the problem, is **generating a list of possible solutions**. It's really crucial understanding all of your options before taking any action, so you can assess their viability and select the best plan of action to take, **taking into account the cost, the time it would take, how it would affect other people, etc.** (Saying these aspects to consider is extremely relevant in your answer, don't forget to do that!)

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3) And then, as is the common way of the STAR Method, after you explain the actions you took and why you decided to take them, you're going to share the results your actions had!

Lastly, since this category revolves around explaining the steps and procedures inside of your stories, there's a possibility of **combining different soft skills in this category**. You can showcase them based on the solutions you used in the stories you selected.

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Here's a list of possible **Adaptability / Problem-Solving** questions:

Explain a time when you took the initiative on a project.

How do you approach problems? What's your process?

Describe a time when you had to do something for which you were not trained or had no experience. How did you handle it?

Tell me about your first job in the industry. What did you do to learn the ropes?

Give me an example of when you used logic to solve a problem

Describe how you used your problem-solving skills to benefit a team or company.

Can you give me an example of when you had to adapt to a new and sudden change in the workplace? What happened?

Tell me about a time when you used creativity to overcome a dilemma.

Give me an example of when you had to suddenly perform under pressure. What happened and how did you handle it?

Name three improvements you made in your most recent position.

Tell me about a time you went beyond the call of duty. Why did you do this, and what happened?

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LEADERSHIP

Simply put, leadership skills are basically the skills to **inspire a team into doing their best work**. That's it. And even if you're not applying to be a leader, this soft skill can be important.

Since everyone has their own leadership style, you might have different ways of answering questions in this category. Seeing that, I decided to give you a list of the best ways of managing teams so you can see which ones are closer to your style, and use that to help emphasize your stories.

1) Trust your team! **Don't micromanage!**

What is micromanaging? It's excessively managing your team, paying attention to every detail, trying to control everything they do.

By getting out of the way, and **giving your team more autonomy**, it **increases creativity and trust**, which produce extremely positive consequences.

You need to get out of their way, in order for them to implement their ideas. Giving your team autonomy and showing you trust them can improve productivity.

2) Understand that mistakes happen!

A team that doesn't make any sort of mistakes is a team that is not showing much initiative and not trying to experiment with new ideas. Of course, sometimes you need to reprimand someone for their actions, but **you need to show yourself understanding of mistakes**, never showing anger of any kind.

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The correct response to a mistake is to talk to the person or the whole team, if that's the case, first to understand everything, but mostly to make sure that they know how they can improve and make sure that the mistake never happens again.

3) Inspire collaboration!

The best way of doing that is by **leading by example**. What do I mean by that? Well, you want your team to be very collaborative. But **you need to create this culture**, in order to guide people into collaborating more. They need to see how open you are to new ideas. This is the best way of developing your team! And again, don't try to be the hero! Even as a leader, that's not a good idea.

Even when you know the answers or when you have more experience around a specific subject, resist the temptation of offering solutions and elicit your team's opinions, you might be surprised with what you hear. But most importantly, you need to **exercise collaboration every chance you get!**

In these moments, just remember to never criticize someone else's suggestions, opinions, etc. If they're mistaken, the best way of telling them is by asking questions that lead to the correct understanding and then asking their opinions.

Another great consequence is that, by doing all of that, you can get your team to trust you and seek your help whenever needed!

4) Scheduling and Delegation!

We already covered the scheduling and the delegation techniques. Don't forget to read them again! They're under **Time Management**.

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Moreover, what you need to emphasize when explaining your scheduling skills in a leadership question is that **you set realistic goals, but you try to make them challenging**, you try to set high standards! Understanding the proper amount of how to push your team is a major leadership skill.

5) Celebrate small victories!

Well, it's really important to understand the hard work your team's been putting in. And praising them, specially when you reach the milestones you have set with your scheduling skills, is even more important! But don't just praise results, make sure you also **praise their hard work and their collaboration!** That has to be one the things you value the most.

To conclude, in the words of a famous researcher and writer on the field of team leading, **J. Richard Hackman**, for a team to be successful, it needs: "Compelling Direction; Strong Structure; and Supportive Context".

Compelling Direction: a leader that energizes and orients their members. People need to feel good about achieving their goals.

Strong Structure: A team that understands exactly what their goals are, and how to achieve them, is way more productive! Scheduling and Delegating are key!

Supportive Context: Knowing that they have support at all times is extremely important. Positive reinforcement (a reward system that reinforces good performance by praising people's achievements with quality feedback), along with celebrating small victories, is key!

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Here's a list of possible **Leadership** questions:

Give me an example of when you had to assume leadership for a team.

Give me an example of when you set a goal for a team and how you achieved it.

Describe a time when you were able to motivate unmotivated team members.

Tell me of a time when you postponed making a decision.

Have you ever had to counsel a difficult team member? Tell me about that time.

Tell me about a time when you successfully delegated tasks to your team.

Can you tell me about a time when you had to perform a task or work on a project you had no previous experience before? How did you approach this situation and what did you learn?

How do you juggle multiple projects?

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FAILURES / WEAKNESSES

First, you need to remember that weakness does not mean something you're awful at, that the company will just have to accept. That's not how it works. So, your weakness needs to be a **work in progress**. It needs to be something that you had problems with in the past, but you've managed to improve on, with **tangible results**.

With this question, what the interviewer really wants to know is **how you maintain your composure after making mistakes**. Do you lose your energy and focus, or do you maintain a positive attitude?

But the way to do that, is by talking about a mistake you've made, or a weakness that you've shown, that has made you grow! So, it's not only about showing that you keep a positive attitude. **You also need to show that you value mistakes, because with mistakes you can learn and improve yourself!**

In this question, what you need to show the interviewer is that **you are aware of yourself, that you don't lose energy when faced with a mistake and that you can take feedback!** That's what they want to know. They need to know that you value improvement, and that if you're ever in a situation where you're causing trouble, that you will be effective when getting suggestions.

Okay, but what qualities should I focus on? What soft skills? Well, this is another category in which **you can select the best Soft Skills to focus on, depending on the story you share**. So, the mistake you made or weakness you've shown revolves around that soft skill, and because of that mistake, you grew! Remember to use the STAR Method!

In my opinion, the easiest skills to correlate are the ones from: **Time Management and Adaptability / Problem-Solving**.

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This is a tricky category, so let's go over some of the things that **you should NEVER do**:

1) Don't mention a recent failure.

Like I said, this failure needs to be something that you had time to work on. When you tell your story, you need to explain how making this mistake helped you grow. You cannot do that if the mistake is recent...

2) Don't mention a Hard Skill failure.

It's not a good impression if you name a weakness that is also a job requirement... So, focus on Soft Skills and the qualities you were able to get from the mistake.

3) Don't mention big mistakes!

I mean, this one is self-explanatory... Even if the big mistake generated big positive consequences, it's not really a good idea.

4) Don't blame others.

I've already focused on that many times, but it's always good to mention.

5) And last, but not least: Don't lie!

Saying that you've never made a mistake is simply impossible. And it sounds very fake. So, don't try to avert this question! Be prepared for it!

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Here's a list of possible **Failures / Weaknesses** questions:

Tell me about a big mistake you've made on the job and how you handled it.

Tell me about a time when you tried something risky and failed.

Tell me about a decision that you've regretted and how you overcame it.

Have you ever made a mistake?

Are you someone who learns from failures?

Describe an occasion when you failed at something. What did you learn?

What is your biggest regret at work?

Tell me of a time when you didn't meet your goals.

Tell me about a time you made a mistake that affected a customer. How did you resolve the problem?