**Competency Based Questions – Reading Material**

**Overview:**

**“Past behavior is a good predictor for future performance”.** Recruitment professionals believe that the best way to find out about a candidate's potential future performance is to find out about examples of past performance.

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

Answer Competency questions with confidence and conviction

**Introduction:**

Graduate candidates don't usually have any experience of the industry to which they are applying and consequently it is impossible for interviewers to discuss previous job roles. Interviewers use competency questions to force candidates to reveal how they have performed in various situations in the past, revealing individual personality traits. These are a great help for interviewers interested in finding out exactly who a candidate is and how they may act if employed.

Look at some typical responses and interviewer’s reaction (silent ones, of course):

**Candidate:** I participated in the Inter-College Cricket Competition.

Analysis:

“I participated…” – Participation in what way - played the game or just watched it live or what… Even if he has played it, what’s the big deal… many a people play cricket.

Participation is not really an achievement. Particularly participating in an irrelevant event should not be stated as an achievement as it is insignificant for the company's business. If you participate in the Tech Talks or discussion, that is relevant and you can always quote it as your achievement. Moreover, when you have participated along with a team then you must say “*we participated…*” or *I along with my team participated…*”

### What are Achievements

Generally, based on the job roles, achievements are the significant experiences which on applying to the given job scenario, would add value to the performance of the candidate and also the company. Suppose you say “*I led my college cricket team to the finals of the Interstate Cricket Tourney*…” This will surely add value as it is demonstrating your leadership quality.

So, when you write or tell about your achievements then make sure that the achievements are valuable to the recruiting company too. A resume submitted for a Software Engineer’s position has the following statement as an achievement “*I acted in movies…”* Acting and Software Development has nothing in common, even if the candidate had won an Oscar, the achievement cannot add value to the job role.

### Accolades and Awards

Accolades or awards are proof of your achievements. Let us look at the following two scenarios to understand the distinction between achievements and accolades or awards: “With a different kind of approach, I have developed and delivered a project in just one month’s time, which otherwise was budgeted for 3 months.” This is an achievement.

“*In my previous job, I received a Star Performer award for the three consecutive years.*” This is the award which has been received upon recognizing some achievements in the performance.

State your achievements and awards / accolades separately. While stating the awards or accolades, don’t give much emphasis on achievements as Accolades or awards are proof of your achievements. On contrary to it, the achievements without awards should have an emphasis on the task, action and result.

**Techniques for Answering Competency Questions**

Each of the following techniques will stand you in good stead during the interview.

**The STAR Technique**

This is also sometimes known as SOAR, where "Task" is replaced by "Objective".

Situation: Describe the situation.

Task: Describe what task was required of you.

Action: Tell the interviewer what action you took.

Result: Conclude by describing the result of that action.

Be positive about your actions throughout your response and do not make up an example as you will NOT come across as believable. If you cannot think of good examples instantly, ask the interviewer for a moment or two to think about the question and then give your answer.

**The CAR Approach**

One way of dealing with this type of question is to use the CAR approach. CAR stands for Context, Action, Result. It helps you to structure your answer like a mini essay.

"Context" is your introduction, where you describe the scenario you faced, date and place. The "Action" forms the main body and should be the longest part of your answer. The "Result" is the conclusion and like the introduction, should be quite short.

Context: Describe the situation and the task you were faced with, when, where, with whom?

Action: How? What action did YOU take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution.

Result: What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience?

### The STAR Model:

Use the STAR model to state your achievements:

**S**ituation: Describe a **situation** that demanded your extraordinary performance / problem solving skill. Like:

“During XYZ project development phase, suddenly, the team size has been cut-down to almost the half and duration was kept same…”

**T**ask: Specify the **task** that you have done differently in the given situation. Like:

“Being a Project Lead, I have this challenge in front of me to complete the project in the said duration.”

**A**ction: Tell what **action/s** you have taken that led to your achievement that you are discussing. Like:

“I asked the team leads to simultaneously work on development, unit testing and guiding their team mates. I personally started working on integration, functional testing and day-to-day coordination between different teams. Throughout the project development phase I was motivating the teams by organizing quick snack parties, personally interacting with everyone. The quick JIT (Just in time) sessions were liked by everyone, etc. ”

**R**esult: Specify the **results** that your actions have given. Like:

“As a result, we were able to complete the project on time and with the quality we have promised to the customer.”

Tip: Use the STAR or CAR Model to answer Competency based questions.

**Examples of Competency-based Interview Questions**

Below you'll find various examples of common competency-based interview questions organized by competency. While this list is not all inclusive, developing answers to each of the questions below will provide you practice and confidence you'll need to perform well in competency-based interviews.

**Leadership Competency**: Leadership Interview Questions

1. Are you open to new ideas? When do you discuss your ideas with team members? What factors do you consider when making decisions?
2. Explain a situation when you took a risk. What motivated you to do so?
3. What actions do you take to motivate and involve team members?
4. Explain in detail how you boast team member morale.
5. Explain in detail how you accomplished a goal?
6. Explain when you utilized a creative solution to resolve a problem.
7. Have you ever mentored a colleague?
8. Explain in detail a situation where you helped two parties come to a compromise.
9. Describe a situation where you were reqired to improve the performance of your team.
10. What qualities do leaders possess? How is leadership demonstrated?
11. What do you do to motivate others? How do you remain self-motivated?
12. Should leaders be granted authority? What do you do to change the opinions of others?
13. Discuss leadership weaknesses you possess?
14. What separates a leader from a manager?
15. Tell us about an instance where you failed as a leader.
16. Describe time where you had to lead a team through change.
17. Describe a situation where you need to inspire a team. What difficulties did you face and how did you address them?

**Communication Competency**: Communication Skills Interview Questions

1. Discuss an experience where you explained complicated technical terms to individuals without the same knowledge.
2. Explain a time when you convinced a co-worker to accept a new task.
3. Explain in detail an experience where you explained complicated information in comprehendible language.
4. How do you relay information to other co-workers?
5. What actions do you take to encourage colleagues to share additional information?
6. Beside verbal communication, how do you effectively communicate with colleagues?
7. How do you demonstrate to others that you are listening attentively?
8. How do you clarify confusing concepts and language?
9. Describe an instance where your communication skills allowed you to make a meaninful difference to a situation.
10. Describe a time when you had to convince a co-worker, superior or team of your view point.
11. What steps do you take to remain upbeat during conversations?

**Customer Service Competency**: Customer Service Skills Interview Questions

1. How do you respond to customer complaints?
2. What steps do you take to maintain good relations with customers? What do you do to ensure they are satisfied?
3. What do you do to adhere strictly to company policy while keeping clients satisfied?
4. Have you resolved a customer concern when it fell outside the purview of your job duties?
5. Have you ever refused a customer request? Explain the reasons behind your decision?
6. Explain in detail how you handled an unhappy client after denying a request that would violate company policy?

**Interpersonal Competency**: Interpersonal Skills Interview Questions

1. How do you maintain good relations with colleagues?
2. What steps do you take to network? Why is networking important?
3. How do you remain friendly with individuals you disagree with?
4. How often do colleagues request assistance from you? When do you request assistance from them?
5. Why is it important to develop relationships with business colleagues?
6. What steps do you take to develop new relationships with coworkers?

**Organizational Competency**: Organizational Skills Interview Questions

1. How do you develop business plans?
2. Explain how you multi-task and manage large workloads?
3. Explain how you determine what projects require priority?

**Decision Making Competency**: Decision Making Interview Questions

1. Explain what types of decisions you consult with coworkers on?
2. Describe factors you consider when making decisions.
3. Provide details about a decision you made when important facts were unavailable?
4. Explain a situation when you postponed an important decision?
5. When an instant decision is required, what steps do you follow to make it?

**Strategic Thinking Competency**: Strategic Thinking Interview Questions

1. How do you brainstorm, relay ideas to coworkers, and analyze complex problems?
2. Provide details about a situation where you conducted a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).
3. Why are management changes typically ineffective?

**Creative Problem Solving Skills Interview Questions**

1. Explain how you analyze a problem and develop solutions.
2. How do you conduct troubleshooting?
3. When responsible for gathering systematic data and conducting risk management, what steps do you take?
4. How do you solve problems and predict risk?
5. Explain in detail a creative solution used to resolve a complex problem.

**List of Competencies and Skills**

Below is a list of other competencies and skills that employers often test for using competency-based interviewing techniques. Depending on the position being applied for, you may want to come up with one or two examples from past work experience that demonstrate each of these competencies.

* Negotiation and motivation skills
* Conflict management skills
* Creative and critical thinking
* Ability to multi-task and delegate responsibilities
* Strict attention paid to details
* Ability to take initiative
* Ability to compromise
* Effective analytical skills
* Strict adherence to business ethics and company policies

Tips for answering competency based interview questions

1. When answering competency questions you can give examples from work, study or personal life, but make sure you give a wide variety of examples and a different example to answer each question.
2. Don't go into too much background detail when answering competency questions. Your interviewer only wants to know about your past behaviours. Further detail is redundant.
3. Make sure your answers and examples you use are the most relevant to the questions asked, rather than the most impressive or elaborate.
4. Don't make your answers up! Your interviewer will find this very easy to spot.

Other Tips for Answering Competency-based Questions

The following are a few additional tips to help prepare you to answer competency-based questions:

* Brainstorm and list experiences that have helped you develop professionally. Consider challenging experiences where you had to resolve problems.
* Thoroughly review each qualification listed for the job.
* Be ready to answer each question with specific examples.

**Final Tip:**

Questions in competence-based interviews are not exclusively based on behavioural evidence. You may be asked some hypothetical questions too where you’ll be asked to say what you would do in a given situation.

While you can imagine how you might respond to a situation and explain how you would tackle it, try always to reinforce your skills by comparing the situation with something similar you have faced successfully before. Always give specific evidence where you can.