

# Use the STAR technique for difficult interview questions

Answering difficult job interview questions requires a structured approach, where delivery and detail count for everything.

We have recorded improvements in excess of 50% in the success rate of candidates using this technique at interview, over those who don't.

**STAR** stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

## How to shine with STAR

The trick to making the STAR technique work is to weave your answers to behavioural and competency interview questions into concise stories with a beginning, middle and end - starting with a brief introduction outlining the situation.

So, in answer to a question asking you, for example, to describe a time you dealt with pressure in a work situation, you might say:

- **Situation** - *I was working as part of a team of six developing a series of web platforms for the first of a series of company website launches. We were confident we'd complete the project to schedule but then two team members, including our manager, fell seriously ill.*

You can now move onto the task section of your answer which should outline the job you faced; setting out the goals and the objectives for your team and company.

- **Task** - *The team was suddenly under serious pressure to meet a deadline on which a substantial marketing budget had already been invested. We were required to meet the original deadline with depleted personnel and an obvious lack of leadership.*

The most detailed part of your answer will be the action, where you describe how you dealt with the task. Here you will detail your use of available resources, the personal and relevant skills you brought to the table and your direct involvement.

- **Action** - *I was up-to-speed with all aspects of the project and confident in my programming skills through prior experience and recent training, so I put myself forward as team leader for the remainder of the project. I was able to draw on my technical skills and on the team leadership skills I'd acquired from captaining a rowing crew throughout university. I motivated the team by arranging incentives including a bonus on completion and two Thai food evenings in the office. The incentives enabled us to effectively broaden our own time frame on the project and run checks on the sites prior to presentation to the board.*

The action part of your answer should leave your interviewer in no doubt as to what it was you did, how you did it and why you did it.

You will now need to wrap up your answer by outlining the result of your actions. This is where you get to demonstrate the benefits those actions had for the company/team and for your own development.

- **Result** - *Under my leadership the team brought the project in on time. The launch was a resounding success. The team were congratulated on a job well done and I was promoted to the position of group head.*

## **Use STAR to keep your audience enthralled**

As with all good storytelling, brevity and clarity are key to answering interview questions. Try to deliver your STAR answers in well under three minutes and always keep it positive, upbeat and free from heavy jargon.

At all stages of the STAR technique you should strive to present your answer in such a way as to highlight your relevant skills and suitability to the role on offer.

## **Rehearsals are key**

We recommend all candidates prepare five STAR stories, based on achievements relevant to the key selection criteria the role requires. Also think of how you can present your answers and achievements to suit different questions. For example, the scenario used above could be used to prove your team work and project management proficiencies as well as your ability to handle pressure.

Ideally you should aim to fit your five most significant career achievements to date within the required job competencies. Don't be too literal with your answers, and use the interview process and key selection criteria as an opportunity to profile your successes.