STAR Behavioral Interview Framework

Idea In Short

When interviewing for jobs, you will likely have to participate in behavioral interviews. Unlike regular job interviews, recruiters conduct these not to find out if job candidates can do something, but that they have done it. The recruiter or hiring manager will expect you to demonstrate your competences, knowledge, skills, and abilities by giving specific examples from your past experiences at work, school, or life.

Behavioral interviews are popular because research shows that how you handled difficult situations in the past is a good indicator of your future job performance. So, spend some time thinking about your strengths, skills and stories to illustrate to the recruiter. You should prepare answers ("stories") that highlight the different competencies and skill sets the employer is looking for. The problem is most candidates might have a general idea of how to answer these questions. But, the answers usually come out way too long and unfocused. The STAR technique is a proven framework that helps candidates present cogent replies on behavioral interviews.

The STAR Technique

All good stories have a beginning (setting up the situation/task), a middle (where the action takes place) and an end (the result or relevance of your behavior). One technique for answering interview questions is called the STAR method, which stands for Situation, Task, Action and Results. That helps you break down your answers into the when, where, what and how, and articulate your specific results without rambling and present well-structured answers. The STAR method stands for:

- **S = Situation.** Ask yourself, what was the problem? Be as specific as possible
- **T = Task.** Then, determine what the goal was—ask, what did you need to do?
- **A = Action.** Identify the specific steps you took to reach the goal
- **R = Result.** Report the final outcome. This is the time to talk yourself up. Take credit

> for what you accomplished, and if you can highlight multiple positives, even better!

A STAR story should be about 2 minutes long, and delivered with energy and enthusiasm about a real experience you have had.

Situation

Set the stage for the story by sharing context around the situation or challenge you faced. In most cases, it's best to describe relevant work situations. But, depending on the amount of directly transferable experience you have, you might want to discuss academic projects or volunteer work instead. It's imperative that you talk about a specific instance rather than your general responsibilities. You should spend the least amount of time on this part of your answer as interviewers are more concerned with the actions you took and results you got. Share the right amount of relevant detail by identifying the two or three most important pieces of information necessary to give the interviewer enough context about the situation.

> As a consultant at X firm, I was working on a $10M project to help a $20B automotive client with its retail pricing strategy. Immediately after the first few weeks, I was put into a meeting with the CEO and CFO.

Task

Describe your responsibility or role in the situation or challenge. In other words, discuss the goal or task set out for you. This section requires a minimal amount of time similar to the situation component. Again, consider just one or two points that best illustrate the task you needed to complete.

> My project leader's style was to throw consultants into the fire so they could learn as quickly as possible. My job was to present four slides during a meeting with our client. I'm not really afraid of public speaking having been on debate teams, but I must admit presenting to C-suite executives for the first time was a little intimidating.

Action

Explain the specific actions you took to handle the situation or overcome the challenge. This part of your answer requires the most in depth description as this is what largely indicates your fitness for a role. Identify and discuss a few of the most impactful steps you took to find success. Often, workplace challenges are addressed by a team; however, it's a common pitfall to use the word "we" to describe how you achieved your goals during an interview. In any case, it's important to focus on what you did in the situation. It can be helpful to remember that the employer's intention is to hire you for the role rather than your team, so you should use the word "I" to highlight your particular contributions.

> To prepare for the meeting, I spent several hours making sure the slides were perfect. I then called some of the senior consultants I knew and spent a few hours on the phone practicing presenting the slides and asking for feedback. During the meeting, I was still a bit nervous, but all the practice had paid off and the presentation went smoothly.

Result

What was the outcome you reached through your actions? This is also an important part of your response to focus on. You should spend only slightly less time discussing the results than your actions. Decide what the two to three most impressive results were and talk about these. Quantify your success or provide concrete examples of the effects of your efforts if possible. In addition, discuss what you learned, how you grew and why you're a stronger employee because of the experience.

> This experience had a profound impact on me. I learned firsthand that even the most senior and experienced people in the world are willing to listen to a 25-year old, as long as he's well prepared and put in the work. From that meeting onwards, I challenged myself by consistently asking to present as many slides as possible to the client. I wasn't always given the green light of course, but at my next performance review, my drive to present to clients was a big differentiator between me and others in my cohort.

Summary

Preparing for behavioral interview questions can be challenging. There are endless potential questions that can be asked, so even starting to prepare for them can feel overwhelming. But just as there are strategies to prepare for the case interview, there are structured ways to also approach behavioral interviews. One such strategy is the STAR Method. The STAR method is preferred in Amazon interviews and Delta Air Lines interviews. Many consulting firms are adopting this interview technique, in addition to case interviews.