

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Remember the five “P’s” – Proper Preparation Prevents a Poor Performance!

Preparation

Make sure that you have received a copy of the job description and that you have read this and fully understand what the role entails. Find out as much as you can about the company, including their structure, products and services from their website.

Competency-Based Interviews – The STAR Technique

It is likely that the interview will be competency based. Competency-based (also called ‘behavioural event’) interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. They require you to draw on previous experience to demonstrate your competence in a particular area.

To prepare for the interview you should refer to the competencies set out in the job description. This will assist you in referring to actual examples and relevant situations. There are likely to be questions on each of the competencies. Don’t be afraid to prepare notes and take them along with you to the interview.

To ensure you provide the interview panel with the information they’re seeking, structure your answers into a ‘story’ using the STAR format, as follows:

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Results):

S: Set the scene and describe the wider context for your answer (*what was the situation?*)

T: Discuss the tasks, deliverables, expectations and/or your responsibilities in the situation you’re describing (*what was required of you?*)

A: It is important to tell the interviewers both what you did and how you did it. This gives you the opportunity to demonstrate the approaches you took and the behaviours you used, which are what make you a unique candidate. It allows you to demonstrate in a powerful manner that you personally were responsible and took ownership for activities and outcomes (*what was the course of action you took?*)

R: Finally, detail the outcomes of your actions: what went well, what went wrong and what you would do differently next time (*what was the result?*)

Be careful to avoid saying “we” – the interviewer wants to know what actions you took so that they can determine how you would react in a similar situation in the future.

Before you go to your interview, using the STAR method, prepare a couple of examples that you can draw on with regards to each of the competencies in the job description. Remember that one example may be used for a number of competencies. The more recent the examples you use, the better.

Planning and Time Management

Make sure you are clear on where to go and at what time. Ensure that you allow yourself sufficient time to get to the interview.

Know how much travel time you need to allow for and aim to arrive at reception about five minutes prior to your interview. Parking can often be difficult, so if you are driving allow extra time to find a parking space.

Ensure you know who to ask for at reception and who will be on the interview panel. The interview will usually take a maximum of one and a half hours, allowing time for questions afterwards. There are likely to be at least two interviewers.

First Impressions

An interview is a formal means to assess your suitability for a job and creating a good first impression is vital. The way you present yourself at interview is just as important as the way you answer the questions asked of you. It is imperative that your appearance is as professional as the organisation that you wish to work for.

When greeting the interview panel, ensure a firm handshake and appropriate eye contact.

Questions to ask the interviewer

Always prepare questions that you would like to ask the interviewer, either about the role or the company, as you will likely be asked at the end of the interview whether you have any questions.

Types of question you may wish to ask may include:

- What is the biggest challenge facing somebody coming into this role?
- Why does the vacancy exist?
- What is the team like?
- Why do you like working for this company?

In Summary:

- Prepare thoroughly for the interview
- Plan what you are going to wear the day before
- Ensure that you know where you are going and allow sufficient time to get to the interview
- Make sure you have read and understand the job description
- Ensure you greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and make good eye contact
- Don't interrupt the interviewer at any time
- Back up your answers with examples
- Be positive about past employers
- Ask questions about the position and company
- Understand your strengths and weaknesses, you will be asked questions around them
- Do not be over confident or aggressive
- Your answers must come across in the interview as factual and sincere
- Make the interviewer aware of your qualities and what you can offer to the company
- Don't answer questions with closed answers i.e. "yes" or "no"
- Never lie – always answer questions truthfully, frankly and in a concise manner
- Smile throughout the interview
- Thank the interviewer for meeting with you
- After the interview please call your McLaren Associates Consultant immediately with your detailed feedback.

GOOD LUCK!

Examples of core competencies and behavioural event questions:

Adaptability

- Tell me about a time when you changed your priorities to meet others' expectations.
- Describe a time when you altered your own behaviour to fit the situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities.

Client Focus

- Give an example of how you provided service to a client/stakeholder that was beyond their expectations. How did you know what they expected? How did you respond?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult client.
- Give me an example of a decision you have made which benefited the client but not you.

Communication

- Describe a situation you were involved in recently that required you to communicate with people at a senior level.
- Give an example of a difficult or sensitive decision that you have had to communicate to others.
- Tell me about a time when you really had to pay attention to what someone else was saying in order to understand their message and be able to act upon it.

Problem Solving and Judgment

- Tell me about a problem you have recently encountered.
- Tell me about the last problem you could not solve.
- Give me an example of a problem that required particularly careful thought.

Results Orientation

- Tell me about the last long term goal you set yourself and how you have achieved it.
- Describe something you have done to improve your own performance.
- Give me an example of when recently you have failed to meet a target.

Teamwork

- Tell me about how you helped the last person to join your team feel like they were a part of the team.
- Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively.
- Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team, and a conflict arose within the team. What did you do?

Developing Others

- Tell me about the last person you coached and how you helped improve their skills or job performance.
- Describe a time when you provided feedback to someone about his or her performance.
- Give me an example of a time when you recognised that a member of your team was performing below the required standard. What did you do?

Impact and Influence

- Describe a recent situation in which you convinced an individual on your team to do something.
- Describe a time when you changed someone's mind.
- Describe a situation in which you needed to change a decision that had already been made.

Innovation

- Describe the last thing you did to improve the performance and/or productivity of your team.
- Tell me about the most mundane part of your job. What have you done to make it more interesting or challenging?

- Tell me about a recent problem in which old solutions wouldn't work. How did you solve the problem?

Leadership

- Tell me about a time when you had to take the lead role in a group so that it achieved its objective.
- Describe a situation where you had to lead by example.
- Describe a situation where you inspired others to meet a common goal.

Relationship Building

- Give me an example of a client that you have developed an effective mutually beneficial relationship with. How did you go about building the relationship?
- Tell me about a time when you relied on another person to help you with a work-related task or problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you deliberately attempted to build rapport with a co-worker or customer.

Self-Motivation

- Describe the last time you were under pressure. What did you do to keep the level of stress manageable?
- Describe the last time you had to pick yourself up from a disappointment.
- Tell me about how you managed your day the last time your manager was not around to help, advise, give out work or provide discipline.

Strategic Thinking

- Describe how you have changed the way you normally work in response to changes in your industry.
- Describe a time you created a strategy to achieve a longer-term business objective.
- Describe a time when you had to think strategically in order to make a difficult decision.

Initiative

- Describe when you have had to make a decision by yourself about how something should be done.
- Give me an example of the last time you were given a piece of work you didn't know how to do.

Attention to Detail

- Tell me about a piece of work you have done where you had to ensure the outcome was perfect. How did you approach this piece of work?
- Describe the last time you were given back a piece of work to do again because it contained errors.
- Give me an example of a time where you had to balance getting the job done well and getting it done quickly. How did you balance these two factors?

Conflict Management

- Tell me about a time when you voiced a concern or disagreement to a co-worker.
- Describe a situation on your team that you had to deal with quickly in order to stop the situation getting worse.
- Tell me about a time where someone has been unhappy with you or how you work.

Planning and Organisation

- Describe a time when your schedule was suddenly interrupted.
- When was the last time that you had to take on extra work at short notice?
- When was the last time that you had to work to a particularly tight deadline?