

# WHAT IS A COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEW?

These are also known as skills-based, behavioural, criteria or structured interviews and work on the principle that past performance is the best predictor of future performance.

Competency based interviews are where the interviewers have clearly identified the skills required to carry out the job for which you are applying and will ask specific questions about the skills involved.

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## **THE AIMS OF A COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW ARE:**

- To obtain information about how you have previously demonstrated the key competencies for the post through specific questions, and To explore the examples further to obtain a clear understanding of the situation; what you did, your contribution and the outcome.

These questions call for examples of situations where you have used the relevant skill. The question would be along the lines of “describe a situation where you used your communication skills to achieve a particular outcome against all odds”.

## **WHAT IS A COMPETENCY?**

A competency is a specific quality, knowledge, skill or behaviour that you should have to be successful in a particular job or role. In demonstrating your competencies you will be showing the skills and the background knowledge necessary for you to perform a particular task effectively, together with the motivation or drive to make things happen.

Typical competencies could be:

- Time management • Negotiation • Decision making • Communication • Problem solving
- Diplomacy • Planning and organisation • Staying calm under pressure • Persuasiveness
- Handling difficult situations • Teamwork

## **WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT IN THE INTERVIEW?**

The interviewers will tend to focus on past situations and your behaviour in those situations.

Questions are likely to start with:

“Please give me an example when...” or “please describe an occasion...” etc.

The interviewer will be concerned with pinning you down in terms of your previous actions in the skill areas they are assessing. It is important to understand that a behavioural question is very different from a theoretical one, which many interviewers often ask. It uses words like ‘did’, ‘having done’ or ‘currently doing’ and will involve you talking about a specific past experience. For example they could assess this competence by asking you the question “what would you do if you have someone working for you who was confrontational?” – a theoretical question. But an interviewer trained in competency-based interviewing would word the question as “When was the last time you had to deal with an aggressive or uncooperative member of staff? What did you do?”

## **WHAT WILL THE INTERVIEWERS BE LOOKING FOR?**

The interviewer will be seeking examples of past behaviour that provides him/her with concrete evidence that you have the necessary competencies to succeed in the job.

The interviewers will be looking for specific examples about exactly what you did in such situations, not what the team’s role was, or what you would do in a hypothetical situation.

You can choose to use relevant examples from your current job, a previous role, or a situation outside of work altogether. You will be asked to discuss the example in some detail.

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## PREPARING FOR A COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW:

Preparation is the key to performing well at any interview. Below are some tips on interview preparation:

- Ensure you have a copy of the job description clearly defining the key competencies for the role
- Think clearly about the key competencies needed for the job
- Take some time to reflect on your experience and the evidence that you have included in the application form and its relevance to the job, whether it be from employment, academic or from another source, for example, from vacation or part-time work, university clubs and societies, voluntary work, study at school or university, holidays and travel or personal and family experiences
- Think about examples, either past experiences or projects which you can use in the interview situation to illustrate each competency
- Think about some additional examples that demonstrate the key competencies
- Think about how you would describe your contribution to your most important achievements
- Think positively about why this role appeals to you, and why you think you should be considered for this role and be prepared to talk about this during the interview

## COMPETENCY INTERVIEWING TIPS

### A POSSIBLE STARTING POINT IS TO THINK ABOUT YOUR PAST ACHIEVEMENTS:

- The things that you have done that you are most proud of
- Situations you feel that you have handled particularly well
- Ways in which you have contributed to the success of the business as a whole

### AS THE INTERVIEW WILL BE FOCUSED ON PAST SPECIFIC EXAMPLES, IT WOULD BE ADVISABLE TO THINK ABOUT POSSIBLE EXAMPLES THAT YOU COULD USE:

- Consider your role in the situation
- Were there any potential barriers or pitfalls?
- How did you overcome them?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- What did you learn?

Compose a paragraph or so for each situation, outlining what happened, how you approached it and what the outcome was. The **'STAR'** format should help you to structure these outlines.

**S > Situation.** What was the situation in which you found yourself?

**T > Task.** What was the specific task you had to achieve?

**A > Action.** What action did you take?

**R > Result.** What was the result/outcome of your action?

The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group; interviewers will want to know what your specific role was in achieving the desired result. Once you have done this, select the examples which you feel are the best illustrations of the required competence.

### HERE ARE SOME GENERAL TIPS:

- DON'T give general examples
- DO give specific examples