

Reach for the star



COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING IS INCREASINGLY PART OF RECRUITMENT, PARTICULARLY WITHIN TREASURY, AS VACANCIES TEND TO BE IN LARGE ORGANISATIONS WITH FORMALISED HR PROCESSES. **JAMES CRICHTON** GIVES AN OVERVIEW FOR CANDIDATES.

Competency-based interviewing assesses a candidate's suitability for a given role by analysing their past experiences to predict their future behaviour. By asking the candidate to give examples of past behaviour in work-related or real-life situations, it is thought that the candidate will demonstrate what their core competencies are, thereby highlighting how suited they are to the job.

WHAT TO EXPECT Questions should be based around a competency framework, which sets out the criteria by which you will be assessed. Each role will hold a set of competencies that will be weighted in importance (essential, desirable, and so on) for a particular position. Your answers will be marked as you demonstrate behaviours that fit specific competencies. For example, a treasury manager might be required to demonstrate strong evidence of analytical thinking, integrity and communication skills. Those candidates who can also demonstrate change management, leadership and problem solving are likely to be positioning themselves towards the top of the interview pile.

Interview questions will be based on candidates recounting real situations that demonstrate the competencies listed against the job. This will tend to be in the format of a broad opening question, such as, "Describe a situation where you had to influence different stakeholders with differing agendas." This will be followed up with supplementary questions, such as, "Whom did you have to influence?" "What tack did you take?" "What objections did you encounter and how did you manage these?"

PREPARATION The job specification is likely to be in two parts: duties and responsibilities (the job), and skills and experience (the candidate). Go through each point in the job section to align the technical areas outlined with your experience, understanding the projects that you have worked on. You do not necessarily need experience in all areas but you should be able to describe where you feel you would be able to add value, or highlight areas for your development for each function.

In the candidate section there is likely to be a list of soft skills or behavioural competencies. Go through these and think of specific situations where you have demonstrated the required behaviours – for example, when you met that impossible deadline by pushing your team to the limit. To make the story flow in the actual interview, remind yourself of the detail and dates involved.

IN THE INTERVIEW Once you have completed the preparation you will know what the interviewer is looking for and where, from your vast pool of experience, this can be

demonstrated. All you need to do is get your relevant experience across. Key points to remember in the interview are:

- Answer the question that is asked. There is no benefit in giving your best example if it is not a relevant one.
- Use real examples and avoid the temptation to embellish the story – it's unlikely to go unnoticed if you do.
- Always use "I", not "we". "We" may lead the interviewers to question your actual involvement in the project.
- Be specific. Do not answer with general examples.

STAR One answering technique that allows you to provide a succinct and meaningful answer to questions is STAR (an acronym for Situation, Task, Action, Result). Keeping to this format when answering the questions should allow you to give a full and succinct answer. It is a reasonably intuitive way of relaying an event so the delivery does not distract from the context:

- **Situation** Describe the situation. This gives a frame of reference for the following narrative.
- **Task** What needed to be accomplished? Set the scene with all relevant information.
- **Action** This is the key part of your answer, where you will demonstrate the competencies that the interviewer is looking for. Explain what you did, and how and why you did it. Stay away from irrelevant or overly complex information unless it is useful to the story, but go in to enough detail for the interviewer to understand how the situation played out and what your thought processes were. This is where you can sell yourself and differentiate your experience from the other applicants'
 - **Result** What was the outcome? How did you feel and what did you learn? The result need not be perfect for it to be an effective answer as this is a good time to demonstrate your ability to learn and outline what you might do differently in the future.

GOOD LUCK Although some specific preparation will provide you with a solid platform on which to interview, it is important to relax and be yourself. Be open and honest, and present your best side by showing that you have thoroughly researched the organisation, possess a real enthusiasm for the job, and have a willingness to learn. Once you have done that, there's just the small matter of the salary negotiation and the new job will be yours.

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