

Using the S.T.A.R Method

There is no doubt that job interviews are stressful. Across the board, from **Healthcare Management to Information Systems Management** professionals—there typically is a common thread of interview questions asked by a prospective employer. You only get one chance to “wow” the hiring manager—so why not practice your way to interview perfection. This article will demystify common interview questions and help prepare you for interviewing success from career service experts; using helpful interviewing strategies including the S.T.A.R. (Situation, Task, Action, and Result) method.

“Tell me about yourself”

Although this question sounds simple enough, many interviewees struggle with this question because they are not sure the type or amount of information to share. Essentially, the answer to this question should be your ‘elevator’ speech and should last between 30 seconds and two minutes. Remember, although the hiring manager is asking about you, they are inquiring only about your professional history—not personal milestones. They do not want to know where you are from, if you have a family, your marital status, or what you like to do in your free time. They essentially want to know about your educational and career successes, and professional goals. Examples are education, internships, volunteer work, and professional association memberships.

A great suggestion is to write out your ‘elevator’ speech well before your interview and practice, practice, practice! That way, you will know exactly what you are going to say and will not feel like you’re rambling on about yourself with no direction.

"What do you know about the company?"

Essentially, the hiring manager wants to know if you have done your homework on the organization. Do you honestly want to work for this specific company, or are you just out applying to every job that you see? By doing your research before hand, you will also be able to ask specific questions about the organization. For example, if there is a change in senior leadership, you will be able to note that when speaking with the hiring manager and ask the follow up question on how/if that will impact the way in which the company operates. It is imperative to do your research on the organization before going into an interview to really demonstrate your commitment to be hired.

"What are your salary expectations?"

The dreaded money questions! It is taboo for an interviewee to ask how much the position pays, but undoubtedly, the interviewee will be asked about the prospective employee's salary expectations. To be prepared to answer this question, it is very important to do your research. You may want to check a variety of sources such as www.salary.com, www.indeed.com, and www.bls.gov, to be able to come up with an appropriate salary range. You do not necessarily have to answer with a specific dollar amount, but at least be prepared to share a range that you are comfortable with.

"Walk me through your resume."

This question sheds a lot of light on the frequency and reason you change jobs. This question elicits a great answer to how you handle change and stressful situations. If you move for minor reasons, the company may think you have a difficult time handling change and stress.

Make sure you explain each job you've held and why you left. A common mistake for interviewees is to read through the entire resume word for word. The person you are interviewing with can read, and they want you to give them a little more "color" about your professional history.

"Why should I hire you?"

This is your opportunity to sell yourself! Talk about your talent, skills, knowledge and highlight your strengths. As the Company, they want to hear that both parties are on the same page. The Company is looking to hear from you, why you truly feel you are the most qualified candidate. Your response should align with your previous answers.

"How would a reference describe you/your work ethic?"

The company wants to know what type of working relationship you had with your previous boss and coworkers. This question can also call out individuals who are not team players or comfortable handling difficult situations. However, when answering this question correctly, it can showcase your strengths. Remember, when the company checks your references, you want to make sure the answer provided is consistent with what your references provide.

"Tell me about a time when..."

It can be said that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior; therefore, more and more employers are using behavioral-based questions to learn about past situations interviewees have encountered, how you handled those situations, and what the outcomes were. Questions like, "Tell me about a time you demonstrated communication skills," or, "Tell me about a time you solved a difficult problem that could have had a big impact," are two examples of behavior-based questions that are frequently used. These queries can easily be

the most difficult during your interview if of you do not know how to properly approach them, and haven't done your homework before the interview.

In order to cover everything the interviewer wants, answer behavioral based questions using the S.T.A.R. method: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. First, give the interviewer the background information (situation). Then, explain the task you were given to complete (Task), and then discuss the action(s) you took to tackle the undertaking (Action). And finally, describe the end product of the result.

Here is an example of a behavioral based question and an answer using the S.T.A.R. technique:

Question: Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills.

Answer:

S During my last quarter of school, I completed an internship at Memorial Hospital in the Health Information Management department. I was the first and only intern the department had ever had, and they decided they wanted to continue with an official internship program.

T In order to successfully launch this program, my supervisor asked me to create and administer a training curriculum for the new, incoming interns.

A To complete this task, first, I outlined all the procedures the new interns would need to learn about like HIPAA standards, how to operate the 10-line phone system, and how to use the health record index and storage system. Next, I created a three day training agenda covering these topics. Finally, I facilitated it to four new interns.

R The training was a huge success. On a survey completed after the training, all four interns rated the program a 10 out of 10 in the areas of usefulness and creativity. In addition, each intern rated my communication and leadership styles as "Excellent."

Some of you may be thinking.... How could I possibly cover all these areas when put on the spot during an interview? The answer is preparation. You know the position and field you are going for, so think about the key skills and qualifications the employer may be looking for. Pay attention to the job description. If the qualifications list "strong oral communications skills" then you can probably guess that the interviewer will ask you about your oral communication skills during the interview. Therefore, doing your research beforehand will allow you to anticipate the questions hiring managers may ask and if you can anticipate the questions, you can prepare answers based on situations in your work, school, or volunteer experiences that

can speak to those skills. Create a list of great experiences that you want to share or could pull from during an interview, and practice explaining those experiences using the S.T.A.R. method.

"Why did you leave your previous position?"

Employers ask this question to avoid a mis-hire. Asking this question allows interviewers to learn about your desires or intentions the new position. You must be prepared to answer this question with brevity. If you start rambling on as you answer, it may seem like you're hiding something.

Think about what excites you about the position you are interviewing for. Here are two more things to remember when preparing for this question, along with some examples of "bad" and "better" answers:

1. Don't bad mouth your previous employer or boss

Bad: "My supervisor never gave me a chance to spread my wings. He was a micro-manager and had me doing the same projects over and over. I'm looking for a position where I can have some independence and be trusted."

Better: "In my previous position, I did not create and implement multiple projects both independently and as a team. With this new position, it appears as though I will be able to experiment with variety and creativity."

2. Don't lie... be honest...(just not brutally honest)

Bad: "I was fired because my supervisor thought I didn't have the entrepreneurial spirit required for the position. I didn't make enough cold calls, and I had a hard time closing deals with clients because I wasn't sold on the product myself."

Better: "It was decided that I was not the best fit for the organization. I was having difficulty making my sales goals each quarter, and they really needed someone who was passionate about sales. That is why this new position is exciting, because it focuses on customer relationships and satisfaction rather than on selling and transactions."