

The STAR Method

An Example of an answer to a structured Competency based Interview Question.

Below is an Example of a structured answer to a common competency-based interview question answered in the STAR format. It is simply an example of how to effectively answer the question – you will obviously tailor this to suit your own examples, but this demonstrates how the star format works, and also how you should be structuring your answers and how much information you should put into it. Remember – the interviewer knows nothing about you, and as such you need to paint as full and as rich a picture as you possibly can, giving all the information that support your answer. The best possible answer is one where the interviewer does not need to ask any further questions to get the information they need, as you will have already provided all that and more in your initial answer.

The Question

Tell me about a time you have had a difficult target to achieve?

Describe the Situation

Yes, I can give you an example of that, it was whilst I was working at XXXXX, as a XXXXX. What my job basically involved was XXXXX, and I was responsible for XXXXX.

Here we have given a generic overview of yourself, the job you had at the time of this example, and what your job duties and responsibilities were. We will then move on to begin to describe the specific part of the situation that is going to answer the question. Remember to always use a specific example.

Whilst working on this role I was targeted to achieve a certain amount of sales within a certain amount of calls, to ensure that I was hitting my sales conversion ratios, in order to contribute to and achieve my teams targets. Now, there was one particular occasion when there were several members of my team on holiday, but our team target stayed the same, so as such I had to make more sales to ensure that my team achieved its target.

Remember that the above is only an example, but you can see how this is a specific example that shows you were in a challenging position, and was not you simply working towards the same old target that is part of your day to day job. Remember, we need this example to show you in the best possible light-we want this to really show you at your best. So, when asked about a challenging target, makes sure that its really challenging. When asked about when you have delivered great customer service, make sure that in this example you are going above and beyond the call of duty. Always make sure that the example you use is the most dramatic and impressive – this is how you will show yourself in the best way.

Thoughts and Feelings

I was quite daunted about this, as I knew that this was an increased challenge and would be more difficult to achieve. I was also motivated by this; however, as I felt that the challenge of achieving this increased target would push me forward and make me keener to succeed.

Thoughts and feelings are a very important part of this answer, as your thoughts and feelings show your motivation, outlook and personality. This is the part of the question that shows what you are like as a person and provides the reasons behind the actions that you take. Don't forget to outline your thoughts and feelings.

Actions

Remember, at this stage we always answer with I did this, and I did that, never we, my team, us, etc.

Because I knew that this was a more challenging target, and because I really wanted to be sure I achieved my target and contributed to the team, I decided to break my own individual target down into smaller chunks thorough out periods of the day, to make my target seem more achievable and to better motivate me. I also decided to proactively make call backs to customers I had previously spoken with to try and increase my sales ratio through further contact. I took shorter breaks to ensure more time on the phones resulting in more sales and took me closer to achieving my target. I also made sure that I was not put off by any customers that were not interested, or any calls that did not result in a sale, but made sure that I treated each call individually, and remained at all times up beat and focused on the target that I had been set, and what I had to achieve.

When describing actions, simply list what steps you proactively took to ensure that you handled the situation or problem fully.

Results

Finally, we come to results, which neatly close the question. Be sure to cover all aspects of the results – i.e. the results it had on you personally, the result it had on a customer (if involved), the result it had on your team, and on the business you worked for.

The result of this situation was that by remaining focused and by breaking my target down, I was able to not only meet this difficult target, but I actually exceeded it. This gave me a real sense of satisfaction, as I really felt that I had done my job well. By doing this, I made a real contribution to my team, and was a direct factor to my team exceeding the teams target, which of course was a great result for the business as despite having less people on my team, we still brought in the required amount of business and revenue to the company.