



# Competency-based interviewing

## A guide for candidates

### What is competency-based interviewing?

A competency-based interview is an interview technique which is designed to draw out what you actually did, said and thought in a real-life situation, in or outside of work.

Unlike other interviews, a competency-based interview eliminates the possibility of a subjective or biased assessment; instead, the interviewer will use a method of investigative questioning.

Interviewers are trained to listen for evidence of the competencies and press for detailed descriptions of actual behaviour.

Research has shown that past experience is the best predictor of future performance.

The advantages of using competency-based interviewing are:

- It allows the interviewee the opportunity to talk about their contribution to a particular situation.
- Competency focussed assessments will be based on tangible specific behaviours associated with success.
- Competency based interviewing is not limited to work experience and responses can also be drawn from personal events to give an insight into personalities and cultural fit.

### What is competency-based interviewing?

A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual which is directly related to effective performance on the job. Typical examples of competencies are innovation and problem solving, development and coaching, business and product awareness, customer focus, two-way communication, team work, motivation and support, drive and commitment and direction and purpose.

### How should you prepare for a competency based interview?

You should think about 2 or 3 specific situations or events, which you may be invited to talk about in detail. In all cases the interviewer is not only interested in your actions or contributions – they will also be interested in the way in which you inspire the actions of the team. Your response should paint a clear picture of the Situation, Task, Action and Result and no response is considered to be too detailed.

For each response, you should adopt the "S.T.A.R." approach:

S

Situation

The situation in which the behaviour or action occurred. When? Where? Who was involved?

T

Task

The task the situation required or ideas to resolve the situation. What was the challenge, What needed to be done? Why?

A

Action

What action was taken? What tools did you use?

R

Result

The Outcome. What happened as a direct result? What did you accomplish? Was it the best approach? In hindsight, what might you have done differently?

Here are some typical questions that you may be asked during your interview:

In answering these questions, you should describe your situation in as much detail as possible – what you did, said and thought.

## Key Competency Questions: Customer Focus

What it is:

Knowing, understanding and delighting internal stakeholders and external customers.

Why it matters:

Business success depends largely upon listening to customers and stakeholders, working with them and understanding their requirements, so we have a long-term and mutually profitable relationship.

- Can you give me an example of a major success or failure you have experienced? Why did it succeed/fail? What did you learn?
- Give an example of a time when you have managed a number of individuals' priorities simultaneously. How did you measure it? What was (un)successful?
- Tell me about a time when you provided a creative solution to meet a customer's specific need
- Describe a situation where you have had to communicate with different people at various levels. What difficulties did you face?



Remember!

- Be honest
- Be precise
- Be detailed

## Key Competency Questions: Communications

### What it is:

Sharing information openly, encouraging others to speak and listen to their views.

### Why it matters:

It encourages honesty, trust and constructive feedback in your relationship with others.

- Tell me about an occasion where you had to persuade someone to come around to your/or the company's way of thinking. Did you encounter any difficulties? How did you overcome them?
- Describe a time when you had to explain a complex topic to a group of people. How did you do this? What did you learn from the experience?
- Can you tell me about a situation where you have had to persuade someone to your way of thinking?
- Describe a time when it was important for you to collaborate closely with others from outside your own team in order to achieve a result. What happened?

## Key Competency Questions: Innovation and Problem Solving

### What it is:

Applying flexibility and creative problem solving, taking novel ideas and approaches and putting them into place.

### Why it matters:

All organisations need to develop to meet the demand of an ever changing market. We need to analyse information, challenge existing systems and processes and identify innovative improvements and solutions. We must also respond positively to change and see it as an opportunity to be welcomed.

- Tell me about an occasion when you introduced an idea put to you by someone else – what was the outcome?
- Describe a recent occasion where you solved a problem with an unconventional solution
- Think of a situation where you have come up with a new way of doing something which was adopted by others. What did you change? Why was it a better method?
- Describe a difficult/complex problem you have been faced with. How did you approach it? What happened? What did you learn, what would you do differently next time?

## Key Competency Questions: Drive and Commitment

### What it is:

Overcoming obstacles and delivering results by showing tenacity and persistence

### Why it matters:

A high level of personal dedication is required from you if the Company is to achieve business success in the face of increased competition and unpredictable circumstances.

- Describe your biggest achievement. What difficulties did you encounter? How did you overcome them?
- Can you give me an example within the last 6 months when you have had to handle excess workloads? How did you cope?
- Describe a project you have worked on where you have made a decisive contribution to successful outcomes. What was your contribution? How was it effective?
- Describe a situation when you have persisted with completing a task when there has been frequent or significant barriers

**Remember: be personal, be detailed, be descriptive and be factual**  
Competency interviewing is not hypothetical – this is your opportunity to talk about yourself and your past achievements, so make good use of it!