

# Interview Skills & Preparation Guidance

## Interview tips

### Homework (If you know who the employer is):

- What exactly does the company do?
- How is the company structured?
- What are the current hot topics (company and industry)?
- What are the company's values and principles?
- What does the basic information suggest? Doing well/poorly?
- Who are the key personalities?

### Phone interviews:

- Agree a time when you know you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Ensure the interviewer has the correct contact number to reach you on.
- Ensure your chosen location is quiet – no background noise (traffic, chatter, children etc.)
- Ensure your chosen location has satisfactory reception if using mobile.
- Try to use a location with a table and space to spread basic documents.

### Face-to-face interviews:

- Avoid cramming in revision immediately before the interview.
- Avoid taking sheets of notes into the interview for reference.
- Avoid taking (writing) your own notes in the interview.
- Try to dress to fit the company/role on offer, not your old or current one.
- Always dress on the side of smartness unless certain otherwise.

# Key questions to prepare for

## 1. Tell us about yourself.

Recommend:

- Plan on 2 minutes max.
- Consider starting with your immediate situation and why you have left/are thinking about leaving your current job (most relevant).
- Go back to education.
- Then each key role/phase of your professional career back up to current situation.

## 2. What do you consider your key achievements? What are you most proud of?

Consider educational, professional, and personal.

## 3. Why are you interested in us and the role on offer?

## 4. What have you been told are your areas for development?

Only ever give 1. Apply STAR. What was identified, what you did, what the positive outcome/development was.

## 5. Tell us about a time you managed a project, or showed leadership or innovation?

Apply STAR. Try to use impressive examples with valuable and positive outcomes. Consider using one of your stated key achievements.

## 6. Tell us about a time you came up against an obstacle or were faced with confrontation?

Apply STAR. Use examples with positive outcomes and/or lessons learnt.

## 7. What is your management style?

## 8. What cultural differences do you think you will face between your previous/current employer and this one?

Try to highlight similarities and skills & methods that both areas share.

# General principles of answering

## DO

- Always apply PEPP:
  - Show that you're **prepared**
  - Be **engaging**
  - Be **positive** and describe **positive** decisions and results
  - **Demonstrate** your professionalism
- Always apply **STAR** when giving examples.
- Always finish on a positive – even when giving a 'negative' example.
- Always be focussed, and interested in the role on offer.

## DON'T

- Do not volunteer examples of failure.
- Do not answer with irrelevance or waffle – answer the question.
- Do not belittle yourself or your achievement.
- Avoid negatives, after-thoughts, cynical or sarcastic comments, and strong negative opinions.
- Never be confrontational with the interviewer.

## STAR

If asked to give an example of something you did, always follow this method:

### Situation

- **Describe the situation you were confronted with.** Why was it important? Why and how were you involved?

### Task

- **Describe the task which needed to be done** to resolve the situation.

### Action

- **Describe what you did.** Be clear about your exact role. Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you made the decisions you did.

### Result

- **Describe what the result was.** Always volunteer examples with positive outcomes. If asked for an example of something that did not work – always use an example where positive lessons were learnt and follow this up with an example of when these lessons learnt were evidenced.

# Asking questions in an interview

Consider asking some of the following additional questions:

- If I got this role, what would you see as my priorities in the first e.g. 3 months? (to future line manager)
- How does this role fit into the company's longer-term plans? (to future line manager)
- How would you define success for this position? (to future line manager)
- As an employee, how could I exceed your/the company's expectations? (to any interviewer)
- What do you like about coming into work here? (to any interviewer)

More importantly, questions you should not ask:

- Do not ask about gossip or rumours you've heard about the company or role.
- Do not ask too much about the interviewer themselves.
- Do not ask if they do background checks.
- Do not ask how quickly you can be promoted.
- Do not ask how soon after hiring you could start applying for other positions in the company.
- If you can Google it, don't ask it (unless the interview purpose is to introduce you to a role).
- Do not ask about salary, leave, or benefits during interviews (unless with caution during 1st interview or openly during final offer/contract negotiations).