

Giving the best interview

David Hanlon, December 2013

Going for a job can be quite daunting and so taking the time to prepare yourself well is a good investment.

What will you say when asked: "Why should our company employ you?"

This question gives you the opportunity to speak about what Jack Welch calls the 4 Es and 1 P. (see side bar)

More likely, the sorts of questions you may be asked can be grouped under the following headings:

- Academic background
- Awareness of the organisation
- Motivation and career orientation
- Self-awareness
- Technical or specialist skills relating to the position
- Hypotheticals or scenarios
- Behavioural
- Significant achievements and other activities

Applying the STAR approach to preparing your answers

Once you have made a list of all possible questions, one of the best ways to structure your answers is using the STAR approach. This stands for Situation, Task, Action and Result. It is a way of structuring your answer to show what you have learned from your experiences. The framework is used by a lot of employee hire agencies, so it is good to prepare your own answers to questions in the same way.

By using this approach you show that you can get to the point effectively and show results. It also prevents you fumbling and wasting time during an interview since you have prepared your responses in a structured way.

1. Positive Energy. Do they thrive on action and relish change? Do they start the day with enthusiasm and usually end it that way.
2. Ability to Energise others. Positive energy is the ability to get other people revved up. People who energise can inspire their team to take on the impossible – and enjoy the hell out of doing it. Doing so takes a strong knowledge about your business and strong persuasion skills.
3. Edge. The ability to make yes or no decisions.
4. Execute. The ability to get the job done.

Passion. People who are passionate about work also tend to be passionate about other things in their life.

Source: Jack and Suzy Welch, Winning

Example: Can you tell me about a time when you had to manage a breach of company safety with a member of your team?

STAR	WHAT	Sample answer
S = situation	Briefly describe the situation or scene.	One of the team had been drinking and was about to drive on site to check a couple of things that should have been done earlier in the day.
T = task	Say what needed to be done to address the situation and what your role and responsibilities were.	Our organisation has a very strict no alcohol policy when it comes to machinery use. My role as a team member is to support both the team and the company.
A = action	Say what you did and how you did it. Include your reasons if they are useful	As no-one else seemed to want to intervene (this team member hadn't had a lot to drink), however I believed it was wrong to breach company policy. I pointed out the policy and said it was wrong and this person shouldn't drive. With the expected response of "who else will do the f'ing job and I'm fine", I offered to go and check on the jobs. This got another blast, however I stood my ground and said it was a reportable breach of our safety policy.
R = results	Say what happened as a result of your action.	Two things really. The first was I was pretty nervous about taking this guy on, however after doing it I felt good, stronger. The second was I saw that those in the team who knew it was the wrong thing, respected me more and I appreciated it.

As with all good storytelling, brevity and clarity are key to answering interview questions. Try to deliver your STAR answers in well under three minutes and always keep it positive, upbeat and free from heavy jargon.

At all stages of the STAR technique you should strive to present your answer in such a way as to highlight your relevant skills and suitability to the role on offer.

David Hanlon is the founder of the Right Mind International Pty Ltd. The Right Mind is a nationally recognised leader in the development of training for excellence in human performance.