

25. Tell Me About a Time When...

JUST THE FACTS: Thinking on your feet is an important part of getting and keeping a job. Interviewers will often ask “behavioral” questions in addition to technical questions about actual job skills. Often times, these open-ended questions will begin with, “Tell me about a time when....” Being prepared for these types of questions - and having a plan for answering them - is an important skill. The purpose of this lesson is to introduce a strategy that participants can use to answer these types of questions calmly and effectively.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 25 (one for each participant)



Directions

Ask participants the following questions:

1. Who has been on a job interview?
2. What types of questions were you asked?
3. Were you ever asked questions that started with, “Tell me about a time when you...?”

Discuss with participants that many of today’s employers ask certain types of questions to see how well people can think on their feet. Sometimes these questions are easy to answer and other times, not so much. There is a strategy to use called STAR to help guide you through the process of answering these questions in a clear and complete way. Use the description on Activity 25 to describe this technique. Before asking participants to work on their own answers, use the following as an example of how the method works.

Question: Tell me about a time when you provided customer service to an upset client.

S - (Situation/Task)

I was volunteering as an office assistant in the payroll department of a local nonprofit organization. An angry employee came to my desk and explained that his check amount was too low and that he wasn’t able to pay rent on time because of the mistake.

A - (Action)

I promised the man that I would work with him to figure out what happened and what could be done. I compared the payroll records logbook with the computer payroll database. I discovered a data error, which explained the incorrect amount. I explained what happened and was able to put in a request to give the man a check for his missing balance.

R - (Result)

The employee thanked me and even asked to speak with my supervisor about how helpful I was.

Offer participants the opportunity to work with one or a few peers. Encourage them to practice answering these questions and learning from each other. The more these types of questions are practiced, the easier they will be in an actual work or college interview.



Conclusion

What was the easiest part of this activity? What was the most difficult part of this activity? How might you practice the STAR technique? Do you think it would be worth practicing? Why or why not?



Journaling Activity

Part of learning how to answer behavioral questions using the STAR method is recognizing your own skills and the areas where you have improved. Do you feel comfortable talking about your skills? If yes, how did you reach this level of comfort? If no, how can you learn to develop this level of comfort?



Extension Activity

Arrange for participants to meet with a series of employers for mock interviews. Ask employers to use a sampling of the behavioral interview questions they use most frequently when interviewing potential candidates. Part of self-improvement is self-reflection. How can you use this activity to improve your soft skills overall?

Activity 25. Tell me About a Time When...

Use the STAR strategy below to guide you in answering the sample interview questions, "Tell me about a time when you..."

Situation (or Task): Describe the situation that you were in or the task that needed to be accomplished. Be specific and give enough detail so that the interviewer understands. The situation could be from a previous job, a volunteer experience, school, or another relevant environment.

Action you took: Describe the action you took. Be sure to keep the focus on you! Even if you're discussing a group project or effort, talk about what YOU did - not the efforts of the entire team. Don't say what you might do or what you might have done. Say what you DID.

Results you achieved: What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU:

- ☐ ...did not agree with a teacher or supervisor? How did you handle the situation?
- ☐ ...were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- ☐ ...were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- ☐ ...used good judgment and logic to solve a problem.
- ☐ ...set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- ☐ ...had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- ☐ ...had too many things to do and were required to prioritize your tasks.
- ☐ ...were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- ☐ ...tried to accomplish something and failed.
- ☐ ...had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- ☐ ...you motivated others.