THE STAR METHOD

Simply speaking, the STAR method is a strategy for answering behavioral interview questions that contextualizes your experience while emphasizing actions and outcomes.

By breaking your response into Situation, Task, Action, Result, you transform a mess of ideas into a clear, linear *story*, with a beginning, middle and end.

Here's *how* it works:

Situation: Set the scene for your interviewer. What were the parameters of the situation? What was your role at the time? Were there any extenuating circumstances? Be specific.

Task: What problem did you need to solve?

Action: Outline the precise steps you took to address the issue or mitigate the problem. Be careful – you don't want to describe general actions performed by a team. Stick to "I" instead of "we" and be explicit in your description.

Result: What came of your efforts? Be positive, enthusiastic, and precise in your summary. As much as possible, quantify your success in terms of actual numbers. How much did you increase sales, or streamline productivity, or cut down on delivery time? Arrive prepared with data in hand.

Here's *why* it works:

Without the STAR method, we too often fall into a series of generic responses. Instead of offering memorable, targeted examples from our past, we rely on stock answers – i.e. 'my extensive background in [x] makes me an ideal candidate for this position.'

By contrast, The STAR method is comprehensive, easy-to-follow, and specific.

Here's how to *prepare*:

Set yourself up for success by planning your responses – at least in general terms – in advance.

1. Start by considering your audience. What do you have to offer to this role, this team, and this company? What are their pressure points, and how can you relieve them?
2. Zero in on a few key themes from your professional history: if the hiring manager remembers nothing else about you, what words do you want them to associate with your name? These themes will shape the entire interview.

3. Choose 2-3 strategic examples to support each theme. These examples should be positive, representative, and detailed. Each one should represent a story with a clear beginning (*situation*), middle (*task and action*) and end (*result*).

Sample STAR response:

A generic response.

I am really good at managing my time. In public accounting I work on several clients at one time and have a lot thrown at me at once. I stay organized and have learned to prioritize so that I get everything done on time.

A STAR response.

Situation: I am strong with time management. At my previous job, I often worked with 3-5 clients at once, each with different needs and deadlines, all while also studying for my technical certification.

Task: I was tasked with working on a public retail client in the $300m revenue range in support of the quarterly audit (10-Q) in which I was specifically reviewing fixed assets, while also balancing multiple other clients and a heavy course load.

Action: This was fairly complex because the company owns retail stores globally so I had to work with the global consolidations accounting team to review GL entries and reconciliations related to Fixed Assets. At the same time, I was also on a public SaaS company which was in the process of implementing the new rev rec standards (ASC 606) which required a lot of technical accounting research.

Result: I was able to do all of this by spending time on the weekend scheduling out my week in time blocks based on the deliverables for each client. I've come to learn that almost anything is manageable if you force yourself to sit down, make a plan and understand expectations upfront so that you can prioritize appropriately.

Practice with these questions:

- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Describe a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.

- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Please provide an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person, even if that individual did not personally like you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.