How to handle a competency-based interview

A competency-based interview is a good way for employers to find out how candidates cope in specific situations, and also provides some insight into whether they can think on their feet, which is often important in high-pressure roles. The questions you will be asked in a competency-based interview tend to begin with 'can you give me an example of…' and the interviewer will continue along a line of questioning in order to find out about a specific competency that is key to the role, such as leadership, team work, relationship management or multi-tasking.

Knowing how to deal with this stage of the interview process is very important, as it gives you a chance to tell the interviewer what is behind the skills listed on your CV. For example, you might claim that you are good at managing relationships but can you give an example of when you have had to manage a difficult relationship? How did you cope? Below, we've provided some tips for dealing with competency-based interviews – to help you to ensure that you get to the next stage of the process and secure that new job!

1. Make sure you understand what 'competency based interview' means. It is a specific method of asking questions that requires you to think on your feet and provide examples of times when you have shown that you have the specific competencies the employer is looking for. Do some research online and have a think about what competencies the interviewer might ask you about, and what questions they might ask.
2. Don't over-prepare though. If you have prepared answers for every possible question you might be asked, the interviewer might think you sound rehearsed and will doubt your ability to think on the spot.
3. Take a moment to think. If the interviewer asks a question that you cannot immediately think of an answer for, ask them if you can take a brief moment to think. They would much rather you think for a moment, than blurt something out that does not answer their question.
4. Stay on track. Don't let your answer go off on a tangent – there is nothing more annoying to an interviewer than having to bring you back to the point you were trying to make in the first place.
5. Be specific. Think about what the question was. If the question was 'can you give an example', don't start your answer with 'I always try…' they are looking for a specific example from your experience, so try to provide one that shows you in a positive light.
6. Personality is important. The interviewer is not listening to your answers, they are also interested in how you come across when you speak. Be aware of your body language and tone, make sure you are injecting enthusiasm into your answers and not just going through the motions.

Ultimately what will get you to the next stage will be honest, concise, relevant answers, delivered with confidence in a positive, friendly manner. You can find more general interview advice on our website and keep an eye out over the next few weeks as we discuss how to handle other parts of the recruitment process.

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