



STAR-LA Interview Response Method

How to organize your thoughts to tell an effective story

“Tell us about a time when you went the extra mile for a customer.” “Describe a process you improved.” These competency based interview questions are based on the premise that how you acted in the past is a good predictor of how you will act in the future. Competencies are composed of a variety of skills, behaviors, attitudes and personality traits. Your response provides insights into your capabilities, thought processes, skills, behaviors, personality traits and learnings. These questions require you to tell a story about one specific experience that is logical, clear and complete.

The STAR-LA Method	
S ituation	<input type="checkbox"/> Explain which job or experience <input type="checkbox"/> Explain the nature of the situation, problem, challenge, obstacle or opportunity <input type="checkbox"/> Explain your role
T ask	<input type="checkbox"/> What exactly were you trying to accomplish
A ctions	<input type="checkbox"/> Explain what you did and why (seek a balance between too much vs. not enough details) <input type="checkbox"/> Talk about key skills or competencies you used <input type="checkbox"/> Talk about the use of related technology, tools or equipment (if relevant)
R esult	<input type="checkbox"/> Explain positive impact of your action/s and provide proof, if possible (quantify or qualify) <input type="checkbox"/> Include how you created or maintained positive relationships with the people involved
L earning	<input type="checkbox"/> As succinctly as possible, describe what you learned from this experience
A pplication	<input type="checkbox"/> Describe how you would apply these results and learnings to the job <input type="checkbox"/> Be prepared to provide another example of when you applied this learning AND SHARE ONLY IF ASKED

Which Competencies Will Be Explored in the Interview?

Carefully read the job posting for transferable skills, behaviors, attitudes and personality traits. For example, below are excerpts from job descriptions with competencies underscored.

- “Seeking a tech-savvy collaborator with a desire to learn and apply technology; ability to effectively communicate with a variety of audiences; and a deeply held customer service ethic...”
- “...An essential part of the job is to work positively and in a solution-oriented manner with customers...”
- “This position requires self-initiated and self-reliant problem-solving and decision making, an ability to work efficiently both independently and with others, ability to synthesize and communicate complex ideas ...”

For each competency, identify an example, either paid or unpaid, from your life experiences. Use the STAR-LA method to flush out your examples. As you outline your story, notice how the story could be “spun” to showcase different competencies based on the various challenges, obstacles or opportunities the experience presented. For example, perhaps your example is to showcase your ability to take initiative, and in doing so, you may have had to persuade others not comfortable with change, or you had to quickly learn and apply new technology, or you had to be creative to find the needed resources to make something happen. Practice telling your story and “spinning” it to highlight different challenges. This will help you to more easily shift your story depending on the question asked.



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Sample Competency-Based Interview Questions

- Describe a work process that you improved.
- Tell me about a particularly challenging problem that you solved.
- Describe a situation when you had to deal with a difficult customer.
- Tell me about a time you worked with someone whose background and way of life were different than yours.

Sample Competency-Based Questions for Leadership Positions

- Describe a time when it was necessary to confront a negative attitude in your team.
- Describe a strategic change you initiated.
- Give an example of when a customer, employee or manager challenged you about a decision you made.
- Provide an example of what you have done to foster an inclusionary work environment.

STAR-LA Example

Interview Question: “Tell us about a challenging customer service situation.”

S ituation	<i>“When I worked at ABC company as a customer service representative, I was one of two people staffing the counter. We normally have a steady flow of about 6-8 people in line, but this time we had about 15. The next customer who came to my station was extremely angry.”</i>
T ask	<i>“My goal was to deescalate her anger so I could figure out what I can do to help her.”</i>
A ctions	<i>“I told the customer that I can see she is extremely frustrated and that I want to listen and help resolve it. I told her that I was going to get someone to help out at the counter so I could attend to her. I went to my lead and explained the situation. He was happy to take the counter and allow me to practice dealing with an angry customer. I escorted the customer to a private customer service room. I asked her to tell me her story and I listened attentively. I affirmed that I was committed to finding a solution and she began to calm down and work with me. As we talked I discovered an underlying issue that contributed to her frustrations. I made a couple of calls to operations staff and was able to offer her a solution.”</i>
R esult	<i>“The customer was so pleased with the solution that she emailed my manager to express her appreciation for the time I spent listening to her, acknowledging her frustration, getting to the core of the issue and coming up with such a great solution.”</i>
L earning	<i>“I learned how important it is to listen deeply. Sometimes there is another issue underneath that needs to be addressed first.”</i>
A pplication	<i>“I understand this position will require outstanding customer service skills. The story I shared was my first experience dealing with an angry customer. I have since dealt with many more and even earned several customer service awards from ABC company. I believe my success is due to having a talent for getting to the root of an issue in a way that the customer feels heard and respected. I have a passion for customer service and know I can bring my skills to this position.”</i>