How is a strengths-based interview?

A strengths-based interview is an interview style which is becoming increasingly popular within the application and selection process amongst many graduate level jobs. Organisations such as Barclays, EY, FDM, Morrisons, Nestlé, the NHS, and Standard Chartered Bank have adopted this interview style to recruit individuals for their graduate programmes.

This type of interview is designed to look at what candidates enjoy doing and what they have a natural aptitude for, rather than what they can do, which is usually assessed during a competency-based interview.

Why and when are strengths-based interviews used?

In recent years, competency based interviews have been the norm for many employers. However, as this was such a popular format, recruiters are finding that candidates turn up for interviews knowing what to expect and giving well-rehearsed answers. This makes it difficult for them to find out what applicants are really like. Some recruiters are now moving to strengths-based interviews which focus on what candidates enjoy doing rather than focusing on what they can do.

What to expect from a strengths-based interview?

The recruiter in a strengths-based interview is looking to find out what kind of activities engage you and energise you; when you are using your strengths and when you perform your best.

The questions in a strengths-based interview will take a wide-ranging approach to assessing your personal attributes. The recruiters are specifically trained, and therefore are aware what they are looking to gain from the candidate and the interview itself. For example, interviewers may seek to identify who you are as an individual by questioning you on what you like, don’t like, how others would describe you, what you like to do in your own time and what you are most proud of. They are even more so trained to take note of your body language and tone of voice, which provide cues to the response you give, enabling the recruiters to examine whether the responses provided are natural and honest. They may also ask questions relatively quickly in order to get a genuine response.

Here are a few examples of questions to expect:

- What comes easily to you?
- What gives you energy?
- Which do you like more, understanding a concept or applying practical work?
- When are you at your best?
- What things are always left on your to-do list and not finished?
- Describe a successful day you have had
- Do you prefer to start tasks or to finish them?
- How would your family describe you?

These questions can be more of a challenge to answer than competency-based questions as they are more open; however there is often less probing. They are harder to prepare for so it is best to be honest and natural in your response in order to show your strengths which relate to the role.

**How to prepare for a strength-based interview:**

**Ensure you research the company:**

Although your strengths are individual to you, there are certain strengths that companies value above others. By finding out the strengths that a company sees as valuable, you can put yourself in a better position to decide if this role is really a good match for you.

**Be prepared to answer a lot more questions:**

As the interviewer is trying to find out about you they will be asking many questions to gain the greatest picture of you that they can. **Be prepared to give rapid responses** and keep the responses natural and honest, like you do when talking about something that you enjoy.

**Have good background knowledge of experiences and strengths you can draw from:**

This will allow you to use the time most effectively, and ultimately land the job. Have in mind activities or tasks you enjoy, as well as your weaknesses.

**Practice answering the questions:**

Use the examples given above to practice answering and structuring your response. As mentioned earlier, keep your responses honest and natural. Use the **STARS technique** ([Situation, Task, Action, Result, and Self-Reflection]) when providing an example in your responses. For example: **What comes easily to you?** Briefly describe what comes easily to you and why that may be. Then provide an example for when you have displayed this.

**Display positive body language:**

Ensure you maintain eye contact - avoiding eye contact can give the impression that you are not being entirely honest. What we say with our bodies is very powerful, and you may increase your likelihood of success by ensuring that you give out positive non-verbal cues. Adopt an appropriate tone of voice and pace. Naturally, you need to ensure that you appear and sound positive, confident, and enthusiastic.
Help:

Book an Interview Preparation and/or Mock Interview appointment with the Career Development Service to better prepare yourself for an upcoming strengths-based interview, or simply if you wish to gain experience beforehand.

Additional Resources:

Prospects

TargetJobs

For more information contact the Career Development Service:

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