

Step 3:

Practice Makes Perfect:

How to Prepare to
Really Hit the Mark
on Your Interview

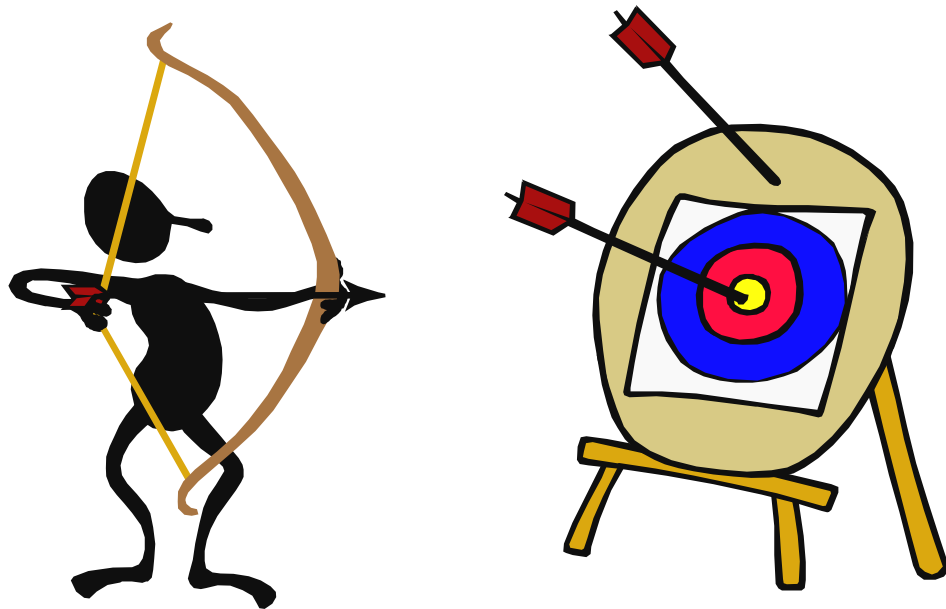


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STAR SYSTEM

SITUATION - TASK - ACTION - RESULT

What does S T A R stand for?

S T A R stands for: Situation Task Action Result:

Situation = Circumstances or state of events.

Task = Tasks – overall – needed to deal with situation.

Action = Actions you took to complete the each Task.

Result = Outcomes as a result of your actions.

Why is the S T A R System a good interviewing skill?

- ✓ Think of interviewing as TELLING A STORY. The S T A R helps you tell your story in an organized manner that is clear to the listener.
- ✓ S T A R helps you organize your thoughts and answers to explain what you've done in the past.
- ✓ By using this technique, you can paint a clear picture of your skills and expertise in the mind of the prospective employer.

What do you mean by "clear picture?"

- ✓ By using S T A R, you're explaining and documenting your work history in a way that a prospective employer can fully understand the situations, challenges, and actions you took.
- ✓ Because most interviewers ask questions on functions and tasks necessary to the job, the S T A R System gives them answers about your behavior as well as your skills and expertise.

How can I practice the S T A R System?

- ✓ Make a list of past accomplishments in your work history.
- ✓ Jot down and describe the accomplishment with S T A R.
- ✓ Revise/edit these notes until they're complete and comprehensive.
- ✓ Keep these notes on paper or note cards.
- ✓ Review before each job interview.

Can S T A R work for anybody?

YES! From entry-level to executive -- from field to office -
the S T A R System works for all skills and job levels.

APPLYING S T A R TO BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A popular interviewing technique is called the “**BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW**” – based on the belief that your **PAST** behavior will predict your **FUTURE** performance. The best way to answer **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS** is to use the **S T A R** to provide specific situational examples, describe how you handled the situation, and summarize the results of your action(s).

By using the **S T A R**, you cover each aspect of the situation, and give the interviewer a clear, understandable answer. Please Note: not all interview questions are behavioral questions. You won’t use a **S T A R** every answer – but you may be able to give a **S T A R** example..

Below are generic samples of both behavioral questions and other common interview questions. Any of these could easily be tweaked into department or job specific questions. Put a check mark next to questions that relate to your job or career path,

1. What specific capabilities/skills do you bring to the job that would be helpful? Why?
2. This job primarily will manage a series of projects. Tell us about a project you’ve managed and outline your philosophy of project management.
3. This job requires staff to write briefing papers and press releases. Give us examples of documents you’ve created and how you constructed them.
4. This job primarily will provide in-house training to other employees. Please tell us about a training class where you developed the curriculum and delivered the training.
5. Give an example where you showed leadership in a challenging situation.
6. Tell me about a time you had to cope with strict deadlines or time demands. Give me an example and explain how you handled it.
7. Tell me about your computer skills and how you use them on the job.
8. When have you had to cope with an angry or hostile customer or co-worker? Tell me what you did and how you handled it.
9. Tell me about a time you had to solve a time-sensitive technical problem in the field. Tell me what you did and how you handled it.
10. This job requires expert data management skills. Tell us about databases you’ve designed and managed.
11. What techniques do you use to handle difficult clients?
12. This job will require you to spend a large amount of time talking to clients and customers. How do you define “good interpersonal skills”? Give us an example of a time when you demonstrated good personal skills.
13. What does valuing diversity in the workplace mean to you? ~ **OR** ~
14. Give me your experiences communicating and working with diverse populations.

HOW TO ANSWER: "TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF"

How to answer "Tell me about yourself"? Prepare a POSITIONING STATEMENT that describes you in terms of the SKILLS, STRENGTHS, AND TRAITS they're looking for in order to fill the vacant position. A POSITIONING STATEMENT connects the dots between their needs and what you have to offer as a job candidate.

Use this Template to create an answer for "Tell me about yourself." Tailor the Template to fit each new interviewing situation.

I was born in (place) _____ and went to school at _____
(OR served in the Military from _____ to _____.)

Currently, I work at _____ for the last _____ years.

Before that, I worked at _____.

People tell me I'm the kind of person that _____.

I believe my strengths are _____.

My interests are _____.

MOCK INTERVIEW QUESTION AND ANSWERS – INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

You are the new Crew Chief. Some members of your crew have more seniority than you and feel they were more experienced and should have gotten the job. How would you handle this?

SAMPLE ANSWER #1 - :

“Well, I’d probably call a meeting of the crew so we could all get to know each other in our *new* roles. I’d talk about the selection process and make a joke that the interviewing panel knew what they were doing because they hired the best man for the job. That ought to lighten things up - and they’d know I have a sense of humor.”

“Then, I’d lay out the work plan right away, so the crew would know that I’m the boss now and I mean business. I mean, a Crew Chief has to lead, and that would be a good way to start.”

“If anyone complained that they’re more experienced than me, I’d tell them - that may be the case, but the interview panel didn’t see it that way. They saw other qualities they liked in me. I’d tell them to put it behind them, because we had a job to do. That ought to take care of that.”

SAMPLE ANSWER #2 - :

“The first thing I’d do is to meet individually with each person. If anyone was angry about the hiring process, I’d listen without getting defensive.”

“During these meetings, I’d tell the staff that they are valuable team members and that I want the crew to be a success. I’d ask for their ideas and input on how we could do things better.

“Then, I’d meet with the whole crew and go over their ideas. We’d come up with a plan to implement them. I’d also tell them that I’d try to get them placed on special assignments and to give them specialized training.”

“At this meeting, I’d acknowledge that the competition was stiff and that I that I know people with more time on the job were not selected. I’d tell them I understand how that might not sit well with some people. I’d tell them that I know I have to earn trust and respect in my new role. I’d end the meeting by telling them I’m available any time they need me.”

MOCK INTERVIEW QUESTION & ANSWERS – SITUATIONAL & BEHAVIORAL

As a Crew Chief for Cascade City Utility, you may have situations that require you and your crew to work with other crews on short-term projects.

- Tell us what experience have you had leading a crew in a joint effort with another crew
- Describe to us what qualities you believe should a team member display

SAMPLE ANSWER #1 - :

“Well um, as far as my experiences working on teams - everyone here works on teams - it comes with the job. I mean, a crew is a team, right? That speaks for itself. You know what I’m talking about - you work here, too.”

“As to the qualities of a team member - I'd say you go in, do your job and not let other people bother or distract you. You don't talk a lot and waste your time or the time of others. Just come in on time, mind your own business, keep your head down, and do your job.”

“I mean if you don't do YOUR job, you're letting your crew down, aren't you? That's the objective – TO DO YOUR JOB.”

“After **your** job is done, you can stop and help someone else, if they need it. If people don't understand that, they're just selfish, lazy and think others should do their work for them. Let's face it, if they knew what they're doing, they probably wouldn't even **need** any help.”

“Other experience I've had working on teams - before working here, I played on my high school football team. And, in the Army, I played on inter-squad basketball on the base.”

EXAMPLE: Interview Question and S T A R Answer

As a Crew Chief for Cascade City Utility, you may have situations that require you and your crew to work with other crews on short-term projects.

- Tell us what experience have you had leading a crew in a joint effort with another crew
- Describe the qualities of a good team member

First, I'll describe my experience leading a crew in a joint effort with another crew. Then I'll talk about the qualities of a good team member.

(Situation)

"Last summer I filled in as Relief Crew Chief at the canal substation. We were doing regularly scheduled maintenance on major Oil Circuit Breakers (OCBs) when we discovered bad OCB contacts that needed new parts."

(Task)

"A repair like that needs to be coordinated with the Machine Shop to rebuild the existing contacts and return the equipment to service.

(Action)

"To coordinate the job, I talked to my crew and told them we'd have to work with the Machine Shop. We developed a plan, and I briefed my Supervisor and the Machine Shop Supervisor on the plan."

"I worked with the Machinists to schedule the work. I documented and reported our progress so the chain of command knew exactly where we were on the repair each day."

"I also worked with the Machine Shop to purchase the right equipment and tools. To maintain continuity between both shops, I used B contracts, direct vouchers, and non-stock material-requisition purchases."

(Result)

"As a result, we completed the repair on time and within budget – and received commendations from management."

"Now – A good team member must:

- Demonstrate a willingness to assist whenever needed;
- Be willing to work with others without friction;
- Take a leadership role when the job requires it;
- Treat all crew members equitably and with respect;
- Communicate with the crew, other crews, and the chain of command; and finally,
- Show appreciation for each other and recognize the good work of others."

STAR WORKSHEETS

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

“QUESTION MOST LIKELY TO BE ASKED IN NEXT PROCESS” INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

Instructions: Do a **S T A R** answer to the question you think you’d probably be asked in your next interview, based on your current career path or desired change in career.

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Tasks)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

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<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

"MOST DESIRED QUESTION" INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

Instructions: Do a **S T A R** answer to the question you really want to be asked – or do a **S T A R** about your greatest accomplishment.

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

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<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

“MOST DREADED QUESTION” INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

Instructions: Do a **S T A R** answer to the question you most dread – or do a **S T A R** for a time you weren’t pleased with your performance.

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

“MOST DREADED QUESTION” INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

Instructions: Do a **S T A R** answer to the question you most dread – or do a **S T A R** for a time you weren’t pleased with your performance.

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

WORKSHEET TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

WORKSHEET TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

<p>S (Situation)</p>	
<p>T (Task)</p>	
<p>A (Action)</p>	
<p>R (Result)</p>	

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK AT THE END OF THE JOB INTERVIEW

When the interviewers have asked all their questions, it's your turn! Interview panels expect it, so be ready to ask some good questions:

- What are some long-term objectives that you would like completed?
- What freedom would I have to determine my work objectives, deadlines, & methods of measurement?
- How is one judged? What accounts for success?
- Can you describe an ideal employee?
- Can you tell me about the competencies necessary to perform this job?
- How is performance measured and reviewed?
- Can you describe a typical day in this job?
- Could you explain your organizational structure to me?
- Where does this position fit in the organization structure of the department?
- How many employees are in this department?
- What is the vision of the department?
- What are the best opportunities for new hires?
- Is there pending legislation that could impact the department?
- Are there major changes in the field, and how is the department responding?

PRACTICE QUESTIONS: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

- This is not an invitation to ramble on – it is your chance to make a **“POSITIONING STATEMENT”**.
- Be sure your answer has some relevance to their world of work. The tale you tell should demonstrate, or refer to, one or more of your key behavioral profiles in action--perhaps honesty, integrity, being a team player, or determination.
- If you choose "team player" (maybe you're the star player at first base on a community team), you can tell a story about yourself outside of work that also speaks volumes about you at work. In part, your answer should make the connection between the two, such as, "I put my heart into everything I do, whether it be sports or work. I find that getting along with teammates--or professional peers--makes life more enjoyable and productive."
- Or you might describe yourself as someone who is able to communicate with a variety of people, and give an example from your personal life that indicates an ability to communicate that would also apply at work.
- This isn't a question that you can answer effectively off the cuff. Take some time in advance to think about yourself, and those aspects of your personality and/or background that you'd like to promote or feature for your interviewer.
- Keep your answer to one or two minutes; don't ramble.

2. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT OUR DEPARTMENT?

- Reply with the Department's attributes as you see them. Know products, size, income, reputation, image, goals, problems, management talent, management style, people, skills, history, and philosophy.
- Project an informed interest and cap your answer with reference to your belief that they can provide you with a stable and happy work environment--the Department has that reputation--and that such an atmosphere would encourage your best work.
- "I'm not looking for just another paycheck. I enjoy my work and am proud of my profession. Your department produces a superior product/provides a superior service. I share the values that make this possible, which should enable me to fit in and complement the team."

3. WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US?

- Don't talk about what you want; first talk about their needs.
- Talk about what you bring to the table and how your skills will benefit the department.
- Talk about how you can make a definite contribution to departmental goals.

4. WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?

- Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need [itemize them], I'm a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to make a thorough success."
- Your answer will be short and to the point. Highlight areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

5. WHAT ABOUT OUR POSITION DO YOU FIND THE MOST ATTRACTIVE? LEAST ATTRACTIVE?

- List three or more attractive factors and only one minor unattractive factor.

6. WHAT DID YOU LIKE/DISLIKE ABOUT YOUR LAST JOB?

- The interviewer is looking for incompatibilities. If a trial lawyer says he or she dislikes arguing a point with colleagues, such a statement will weaken or destroy--his or her candidacy.
- Most interviews start with a preamble by the interviewer about the company. Pay attention: That information will help you answer the question. In fact, any statement the interviewer makes about the job or corporation can be used to your advantage.
- It's best to say you liked everything about your last job. You might even say your company taught you important lessons about business, achievement, or your professional profile. Criticizing a prior employer is a warning flag that you could be a problem employee. No one intentionally hires trouble, and that's what's behind the question.
- Keep your answer short and positive. You might continue with, "I really liked everything about the job. The reason I want to leave it is to find a position where I can make a greater

7. WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A JOB?

- An opportunity to use skills, to perform, to contribute, and be recognized.

8. PLEASE GIVE ME YOUR DEFINITION OF (THE POSITION FOR WHICH YOU ARE BEING INTERVIEWED).

- Keep it brief, actions and results oriented

9. HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE YOU TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNIT?

- Very quickly after a little orientation and a brief period of adjustment on the learning curve.

10. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE DOING 5 YEARS FROM NOW?

- The safest answer contains a desire to be regarded as a true professional and team player. As far as promotion, that depends on finding a manager with whom you can grow. Of course, you will ask what opportunities exist within the company before being any more specific:
- "From my research and what you have told me about the growth here, it seems Operations is where the heavy emphasis is going to be. It seems that's where you need the effort and where I could contribute toward the company's goals."

OR

- "I have always felt that first-hand knowledge and experience open up opportunities that one might never have considered, so while at this point in time I plan to be a part of [e.g.] operations, it is reasonable to expect that other exciting opportunities will crop up in the meantime."

YOUR WORK HABITS AND STYLE

11. IF I SPOKE WITH YOUR PREVIOUS BOSS, WHAT WOULD HE SAY ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

- Emphasize skills -- don't be overly negative about your weaknesses; it's always safe to identify a lack of a skill or experience as a shortcoming rather than a personal characteristic.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

12. CAN YOU WORK UNDER PRESSURES, DEADLINES, ETC.?

- You might be tempted to give a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but don't. It reveals nothing, and you lose the opportunity to sell your skills and value profiles. Actually, this common question often comes from an unskilled interviewer, because it is closed-ended.
- As such, the question does not give you the chance to elaborate. Whenever you are asked a closed-ended question, mentally add: "Please give me a brief yet comprehensive answer." Do that, and you will give the information requested and seize an opportunity to sell yourself.
- For example, you could say: "Yes, I usually find it stimulating. However, I believe in planning and proper management of my time to reduce panic deadlines within my area of responsibility."

13. WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

- Use STAR. Keep your answers job related. Don't exaggerate accomplishments.
- You might begin your reply with: "Although I feel my biggest achievements are still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with . . . I made my contribution as part of that team and learned a lot in the process. We did it with hard work, concentration, and an eye for the bottom line."

14. DO YOU PREFER WORKING ALONE OR WITH OTHERS?

- This question is usually used to determine whether you are a team player. Before answering, know whether the job requires you to work alone. Then answer appropriately. Perhaps:
- "I'm quite happy working alone when necessary. I don't need much constant reassurance. But I prefer to work in a group--so much more gets achieved when people pull together."

15. HOW DO YOU TAKE DIRECTION?

- The interviewer wants to know if you are open - minded and can be a team player. Can you follow directions? Are you a difficult, high-maintenance employee? Hopefully, you are a low-maintenance professional who is motivated to ask clarifying questions about a project before beginning, and who comes back to ask for direction as circumstances dictate.
- This particular question can also be defined as "How do you accept criticism?" Your answer should cover both points:
- "I take direction well and recognize that it can come in two varieties, depending on the circumstances. There is carefully explained direction, when my boss has time to lay things out for me in detail; then there are those times when, as a result of deadlines and other pressures, the direction might be brief and to the point. While I have seen some people get upset with that, personally I've always understood that there are probably other considerations I am not aware of. As such, I take the direction and get on with the job without taking offense, so my boss can get on with her job. It's the only way.

16. WHAT WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT DECISION YOU EVER HAD TO MAKE?

- Attempt to relate your response to the prospective employment situation.
- Use STAR to demonstrate your most difficult decision.

17. HOW DO YOU RESOLVE CONFLICT ON A PROJECT TEAM?

- First discuss issues privately.
- Use STAR to show how you've resolved conflict in the past.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

18. WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT SITUATION YOU HAVE FACED?

- Use STAR.
- The question looks for information on two fronts: How do you define difficult? And, how did you handle the situation?
- You must have a story ready for this one in which the situation both was tough and allowed you to show yourself in a good light.
- Avoid talking about problems that have to do with co-workers. You can talk about the difficult decision to fire someone, but emphasize that once you had examined the problem and reached a conclusion you acted quickly and professionally, with the best interests of the company at heart.

19. WHAT ARE YOUR STRONG POINTS?

- Use STAR.
- Present at least three and relate them to the interviewing company and job opening.

20. WHAT ARE YOUR WEAK POINTS?

- Don't say "none," & don't cite personal characteristics; be ready to have one if pressed.
- Talk about something you overcame – like lack of confidence, or lack of a specific skill you needed to do you job well, and outline the steps you took (or are taking) to overcome and conquer this weakness.

21. YOU MAY BE OVERQUALIFIED OR TOO EXPERIENCED FOR THE POSITION WE HAVE TO OFFER.

- Emphasize your interest in a long-term association.
- You will get a faster return on investment because I have more experience than the job requires.

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

22. WHAT IS YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE? (If you've never thought about this, it's high time you did.)

- Open door is best. . . . while getting the job done

23. ARE YOU A GOOD MANAGER? GIVE AN EXAMPLE. WHY DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE POTENTIAL?

- Use STAR.
- Keep your answer achievement and task oriented; emphasize management skills-- planning, organizing, controlling, interpersonal, etc.

24. WHAT DID YOU LOOK FOR WHEN YOU HIRED PEOPLE?

- Skills, initiative, adaptability.

25. DID YOU EVER FIRE ANYONE? IF SO, WHAT WERE THE REASONS AND HOW DID YOU HANDLE IT?

- You have had experience with this and it worked out well.

26. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MOST DIFFICULT TASK IN BEING A MANAGER?

- Being a good Coach to my team so they can do the best job on the project
- Getting things planned and done on time within the budget.

MORE SAMPLE ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

Think back to job interviews you've had throughout your career, and how you dreaded being asked one of "those" questions -- the ones that are difficult and problematic for you. How do you handle problem questions? **PRACTICE** -- identify the hard questions and practice answering them until you're comfortable. Below are sample answers to commonly asked interview questions.

"WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?"

Never admit to a real "weakness." Why point out a problem that will make the interviewer less likely to hire you? Instead, tell them about a weakness you identified in yourself and how you addressed it.

"Several years ago, my major weakness was fear of computers. I knew just enough to get along. Then, one day a co-worker sat me down and started to teach me how to properly use the computer. From then on, I was hooked! I started taking every class I could find. And now, I'm teaching computer classes!"

"WHY DID YOUR LAST JOB END?"

• OR •

"WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?"

Never lie -- but don't go into specific details that could put you in a bad light. If you left your last job under negative circumstances, talk about your desire to seek a work environment that is a better match with your personal work and learning styles.

This way, you haven't said anything directly negative about you or your past employer, and instead you've shifted the focus on your desire to seek an organizational culture that is a "better fit."

The interviewer will probably know, by your answer, that there may have been conflicts at your last job, but will appreciate the tact and professionalism you showed in answering this question.

***“HOW DID YOU GET ALONG WITH
YOUR FORMER BOSS AND CO-WORKERS?”***

Again: Never “bad mouth” a former employer. Instead, talk about how you endeavor to develop and maintain positive working relationships.

Again: The interviewer will most likely recognize the discretion and professionalism in your answer.

Also: A new employer wants to feel that, if you’re hired, you’ll be a loyal employee who will get along with co-workers.

“There were some challenging personalities but I did my best to get along with everyone and understand their point of view.”

***“PLEASE EXPLAIN THE SIX-MONTH
GAP BETWEEN YOUR LAST TWO JOBS.”***

If you’ve had personal, family, or financial problems that caused gaps in your work history, answer without giving damaging, private or personal information. Make a broad, general statement using “neutral” language.

“We experienced family issues that required my full attention. They are resolved and I am ready to return to work.”

HOW TO HANDLE “INAPPROPRIATE” QUESTIONS

Sometime in your career, you may experience a job interview where the interviewer asks questions of a personal nature, or questions you believe to be of a discriminatory or harassing nature. Practice ways to handle these questions in a manner that will keep you in control and give you credibility, if you deem it necessary to report the incident.

If An Interviewer Asks Personal and Private Questions, Such As:

“Do you have any children?”

“What does your spouse do for a living?”

“Do you attend church regularly?”



An Appropriate Response Would Be:

“I will answer all questions relating to my professional skills and expertise. However, information of a private nature is not relevant for this interview.”



If an interview asks you questions with racial or sexual overtones, you don't have to tolerate this behavior. **Comments or questions with racial or sexual connotations are inappropriate and discriminatory, and are a violation of your rights.**

If You Find Yourself in this Situation, Stop the Interview, Stand Up, Look the Interviewer Straight in the Eye, and Say:

“Thank you for your time, but this interview is now over,” and walk away.



Report the incident to the proper authority, depending on whether the interview took place inside or outside City government. If inside City government, you can report it to your EEO Officer or SOCR. If outside the City, go to the State Human Rights Commission.