

# Sample Interview Questions with Appropriate Answers

## Problem Solving

Problem solving is a frequently required workplace competency whether the employer is exploring management competencies, sales competencies, customer service competencies or administrative competencies.

Describe a difficult problem you had to sort out in your last job.

This behavior interview question is designed to explore your ability to identify, analyze and solve problems. Show how you are able to gather and organize the necessary information and identify the best solution.

*"We were getting a lot of complaints about late deliveries". (Situation)*

*"I met with the staff involved in the customer delivery department and discovered that the problem seemed to be with the stock coming through on time. I investigated and found that requests for new inventory were not processed fast enough. The backlog was in the orders department as they were not following up adequately with the suppliers. A system for regular follow-up was quickly implemented." (Action)*

*"This sorted out the stock problems and the delivery staff were able to meet their deadlines." (Result)*

## Initiative

The ability to use your initiative is often explored during competency-based interviewing. The interviewer wants to know if you are proactive and able to generate workable ideas. Show how you are a self-starter who will take action beyond what is asked of you.

Describe a new idea or suggestion that you made to your supervisor recently.

*"I work in orders and the company was launching a new product. The sales team had in-depth training on it but we had none." (Situation)*

*"I suggested that the orders department should also receive the training so that we would understand what was being ordered and be able to answer any questions if necessary. It was agreed we would all undergo a short version of the training." (Action)*

*"This meant that we could deal professionally with the orders. It also motivated us as we felt part of the launch team." (Result)*

## Judgment

Judgment is another essential behavioral competency in the workplace. The interviewer is exploring your ability to make logical decisions and take action. Show how you consider all the relevant facts, weigh up the alternatives and commit to the most appropriate action.

Tell me when you had to use your judgment to make a tough decision in your previous job.

*"I was responsible for ordering office supplies for the company." (Situation)*

*"The company always ordered a month's supply at a time to keep inventory costs low. I had to decide whether to keep doing this or buy six month's supply and get a discount for ordering such a big volume and escape possible future price increases. I did some research and worked out we could reduce our costs by buying for six months, especially since the amount we used remained practically unchanged month on month." (Action)*

*"I was right, the prices went up by 10% during those six months." (Result)*

## Coping Skills

The interviewer wants to know whether you are able to perform under pressure and cope with difficult situations. Show that you can stay calm and you are able to plan to reduce stress.

Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and used your coping skills.

*"I worked for a manager who used to shout at me when he was under pressure to meet deadlines. (Situation)*

*I got upset the first couple of times and then I decided to talk to him about it. I empathized with the stress he was under and suggested that he communicated his expectations clearly to me on a daily basis so that I knew exactly when he needed something and I could also give him feedback on progress. We arranged an early morning feedback meeting every day. (Action)*

*This helped as we were able to sort out issues immediately and anticipate likely problems." (result)*

## Resilience

The interviewer is looking at your ability to handle disappointment and rejection. Show how you handle criticism whilst maintaining enthusiasm and performance.

Tell me about a time when you received negative feedback from your manager. How did you handle this?

*"I had worked hard on a presentation to a potential customer. My boss told me that he was disappointed in the quality of the information I presented and that the customer had not been impressed. (Situation)*

*I was surprised as I felt I had prepared well but I asked my boss to go through the presentation with me again and explain exactly what the problems were. He pointed out outdated information and I realized that I had not used the most recent financial information in my preparation. I researched the updated information and asked if I could rework things and prepare a new proposal for the customer. He agreed. Once I had sent the proposal I followed up with the customer to ask if he had any queries. (Action)*

*We didn't get that particular contract but the company has asked us to submit a proposal for some other business" (Result)*

## Adaptability

In this sample interview question the interviewer wants to know if you can effectively perform in different environments and with different tasks, people and responsibilities. Show that you can adjust your actions to meet changing demands and tasks.

Tell me about a time you had to quickly adjust your work priorities to meet changing demands.

*"I was in the middle of drawing up my departmental budget when I was asked to put together a costing for a big project we were tendering for. (Situation)*

*I made an outline of the information I needed immediately for the costing and assigned a portion to each of my staff. I spent the next couple of days drawing up schedules of the tasks that needed to be carried out to complete the costing and meeting with staff*

*members to brief them and get feedback. I was then able to re-focus on completing the budget on time. (Action)*

*The costing was completed on time, each staff member really contributed and I didn't miss my budget deadline". (Result)*

## Reliability

This competency involves taking responsibility for your own performance and completing work in a timely, consistent and accurate manner.

Tell me about a time you made a mistake at work. How did you deal with it?

In your answer show you are able to take responsibility for your mistakes. Highlight your attitude to meeting personal commitments and doing what you promise. Focus on the importance of trustworthiness and job commitment.

## Integrity

This competency manifests in maintaining social, organizational and ethical norms. Respecting confidentiality, organizational regulations and personal commitments.

- Has your manager/supervisor ever asked you to do something that you were uncomfortable with? How did you handle this?
- Tell me about a time you witnessed a fellow employee do something that you didn't think was appropriate.

In your answer focus on how you adhere to organizational policies and procedures. Your answer should show that you are able to behave in a responsible manner and be courageous and honest enough to remain on the side of correct work standards. Integrity means having the confidence to take relevant action if a colleague is violating professional and organizational standards.

## Energy

A person with energy is able to maintain a high activity level and sustain productivity over long periods of time.

- Tell me about a time you had to work at a fast pace for an extended period of time. How did you maintain your work pace?
- What job activities have required the most energy? How did you maintain your effectiveness while working on these activities?

In your answer focus on your ability to work long hours while remaining effective, to perform mentally or physically taxing work for extended periods of time. Highlight your stamina and enthusiasm. Show a commitment to putting in additional effort.

## Tenacity

This competency is the ability to stay with a plan of action until the desired outcome is achieved or no longer reasonably attainable.

- Tell me about the longest time it took you to conclude a deal with a customer.
- Describe a situation when you had to overcome a number of obstacles to achieve an objective.

In your answer focus on your ability to make repeated attempts to get to your objective, to stay with the task until it is completed and to make a plan to overcome obstacles that arise along the way.

## Attention to Detail

In asking this behavioral interview question the interviewer wants to know if you are able to accurately complete your tasks with close attention to all aspects of your work and carefully control errors. In your interview answer show that you are concerned with maintaining accuracy and check your work for errors.

Describe what you do to control mistakes in your work.

*"In my last position I had to make all the travel arrangements for my manager. (Situation)*

*I listened carefully, noted down what she needed and then read it back to her to confirm that I had it right. I would also follow up with a detailed email to check again. Once I had made the arrangements I would set up a time to give her feedback and check I had everything she needed. I then followed this up with an email with all the confirmed details. (Action)*

*This was time-consuming for both of us but it meant that no errors were made in the arrangements. It would have been more frustrating and costly not to have made such thorough checks" (Result)*

## High Work Standards

All interview questions around work performance are designed to explore whether you set high standards for yourself and strive to meet these standards. What do you consider to be a "high standard"? In your interview answer demonstrate how you attempt to attain high performance standards and correct substandard performance.

Tell me about a time that you were not satisfied with your work performance. What did you do about it?

*"My performance review rating was lower than I had expected or wanted. (Situation)*

*I met with my manager to establish a plan of action for improvement and set very specific targets to be met on a monthly basis. I worked hard to meet these targets and constantly monitored my performance. I also asked for regular feedback about my performance. (Action)*

*After six months, my boss conducted another review and my rating was much higher." (Result)*

## Organizing and Planning

The interviewer is exploring your ability to set objectives and schedule and prioritize your activities appropriately. In your interview answer show how you are able to set a course of action, allocate resources accordingly and plan tasks to reach objectives.

Describe a situation in which you had to schedule your activities to meet a work objective.

*"I had to complete a training report every month. This involved collating and presenting a large amount of information. (Situation)*

*I scheduled all the data collecting tasks. Each department was given a monthly deadline to submit information to me and I scheduled reminders to be sent out before the deadline. I set aside a time in my diary each month to collate all the information and check it. Then I allocated time for drawing up and presenting the report. (Action)*

*This worked well and I always comfortably met my deadline." (Result)*