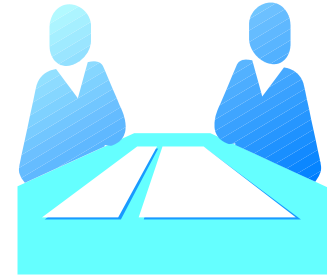


Behavioural/Competency-based Interviews

Behavioural interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. The interviewer will want specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours. Prior to interview each position is assessed for the skills/competencies and characteristics that relate to job success. Interview questions are then developed to probe into these areas. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate candidates.



The word **competency** is widely used in business and personnel psychology and refers to the behaviours that are necessary to achieve the objectives of an organisation. A competency is also something you can measure and lists of competencies form a common language for describing how people perform in different situations. Every job can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that they can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and of course, selection.

- **Individual competencies** – your personal attributes: *Flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity*
- **Managerial competencies** – taking charge of other people: *Leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control*
- **Analytical competencies** – the elements of decision making: *Innovation, analytical skills, numerical problem solving, problem solving, practical learning, detail consciousness*
- **Interpersonal competencies** – dealing with other people: *Communication, impact, persuasiveness, personal awareness, teamwork, openness*
- **Motivational competencies** – the things that drive you: *Resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus*

Taken from *How to Master Psychometric Tests* by M Parkinson (reference copy available at VUW Careers Resource Library)

To prepare for this type of interview, first review the job description carefully and identify the skills and traits likely to be assessed. Next, identify the situations and experiences that you will refer to in the interview to

demonstrate these skills and traits. Competency focussed, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will win you the interview. The **STAR** model will provide a structure to your answers:

- **Situation** - describe a situation or problem that you have encountered
- **Task** - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem
- **Action** - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome
- **Results** - highlight outcomes achieved

Take a look at this extract from the interview guidelines of a major Wellington-based employer.

Competency: Customer Focus:

Definition: Individuals who display this competency understand and believe in the importance of customer focus. They listen to and understand the needs of external and internal customers. They meet and exceed customer needs to ensure satisfaction.

Behavioural Indicators:

Demonstrates the importance of customer service by giving customer needs top priority. Deals effectively with customers by displaying a professional, courteous and empathetic approach.

Interview Question:

Can you give us an example of when you have dealt with an upset or angry customer in the past? What was the situation? Why had it happened? What did you do? How was the situation resolved?

Describe the **Situation** and the **Task** briefly. Most of your answers should focus on **Action** and **Results**; applying the who (you), what, when, where, why and how model used in journalism will keep you focussed and make your description more interesting.

Questions about ...

Influencing or Persuading Others

You may have strong verbal skills but can you influence another person to change their thinking or take some action – perhaps a colleague follows your advice or a client decides to buy a service or product. At management level have you the skills to persuade and involve rather than coerce and punish? Are you ethical in your dealings with people?

- Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly.
- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with.
- See this pen I'm holding...sell it to me.
- Tell me about a person or event that has been influential in your personal development.

Interpersonal and Team Skills



Employers need people who are socially competent. The desire to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical. Many workplaces function on the basis of project teams.

These teams are task oriented and short lived. Those who are highly collaborative and co-operative are most likely to thrive in this type of environment.

- What experience have you had working on a team?
- What skills and personal qualities have you contributed to the teams you have been part of?
- Tell me about a time when you used tact and diplomacy.
- Tell me about the last time you had a disagreement with someone.
- Tell me about the most difficult person you have worked with.
- What have you disliked in your past jobs?
- What kinds of people do you enjoy working with?
- What kinds of people frustrate you?
- What qualities do you admire most in others?

Communication Skills

Daniel Goleman writing on Emotional Intelligence suggests that the key to successful communications is being able to listen to all types of communication in an open way. Are you an active listener, do you really listen and do you hear what is actually said. Are you able to read the non-verbal messages that others communicate? Do you communicate in an engaging and convincing way?

- Tell me about a time when you were successful in getting crucial information from another person.
- Tell me about a time when someone misunderstood what you were attempting to communicate to them.
- Tell me about a current event you have been following in the press.
- What do you think are the three most important things about communication?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with people from a culture unlike your own. What did you do to overcome any perceived barriers to communication?

Personal Adaptability, Energy and Resilience

How quickly and how positively will you adapt to changes in work practices, work roles and work environments and the general flux of the modern workplace? How do you manage or avoid stress?

- Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was criticised.
- Tell me about a time when you felt under pressure.
- Tell me about a time when you felt frustrated by your work.
- How would you respond if a project you had been working on was re-assigned to someone else or shelved?
- What do you do for enjoyment in your leisure time?
- What makes you laugh?
- Describe something creative that you've done.
- What has been your most satisfying/ disappointing experience?

Self-management, Self-motivation and Self-knowledge

Do you always strive to achieve a standard of excellence, use initiative at the appropriate time, and show persistence in pursuing goals? Accurate self-assessment skills will allow you to be objective and critical in evaluating your strengths and weaknesses. How will your personality and temperament effect the existing team or work group?

- Tell me about a time when you acted over and above the expectations of your role.
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- Tell me something about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a close friend who knows you well would describe you?
- How do you think an enemy would describe you?
- How would you describe your management style?
- What are the two most significant accomplishments in your career so far?
- What are your three major accomplishments?
- What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
- What's your greatest weakness?

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What does "success" mean to you?
- What does "failure" mean to you?
- In the past year, what have you been dissatisfied about in your performance?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- What do you expect to be earning in 5 years?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How has your university experience prepared you for a career in this field?
- How do your skills relate to our needs?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are your interests outside work?
- Tell me about a major problem you have encountered and how you dealt with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- How do you cope with routine work?

Administrative Skills

Generally checking that you have effective work habits, and the knowledge of workplace routines and some experience of common office administration systems.

- Tell me how you organise your work and schedule your time.
- Tell me about computer software packages you are familiar with and your experience in using them.
- Tell me about your experience of managing a budget.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

What's your problem-solving style? Do you manage your activities to minimise or avoid them? How do you behave in a crisis?

- Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made.
- What significant problems have you faced in the last year?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the circumstances and what did you do?
- What impact do you think ... will have on our business?
- How would you motivate an employee who was performing poorly?
- Tell me about a situation where you achieved a satisfactory outcome to a problem that others thought couldn't be solved. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you had conflicting priorities and what you did to resolve them.
- What kind of problems do you handle best?

Conflict Management and Ethics

How do you behave in a crisis? What does it take to shake your poise or self-confidence? What approach do you take to problem solving?

- Tell me about a significant crisis you have faced.
- Tell me about a difficult customer or a customer complaint that you have dealt with.
- How do you resolve conflict in the groups or teams that you have membership of?
- How would you resolve a dispute?
- Have you ever anticipated a difficult situation before it arose? Describe the situation, the action you took and the outcome.
- What would you do if your colleagues were complaining to you about the organisation?
- Tell me about a time when you bent the rules. When is it okay to do so?

Personal and Career Objectives

Employers are likely to invest money in your training and development and will want to ensure that your objectives don't conflict with theirs.



- What are your short and long-term goals?
- When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are the most important things you are seeking in a career?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What salary are you looking for?
- What person do you admire most and why?
- Why do you want this position?

Knowledge of the Organisation and Role

What are your motives in applying to this organisation: Were they well thought out? Do you know enough about this work area and this organisation to be clear about how your skills fit into it?

- Why did you apply for this position?
- How would you measure your success or failure in this job?
- What skills and personal qualities are essential for success in this role?
- How do you plan to keep up with developments in your field?
- What would you like to know about this organisation?
- What do you believe you can contribute to this organisation?
- What do you know about our industry?
- What do you know about our organization?

- Why are you interested in working for our organization?
- Why should I hire you?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Which three of the competencies required for this position would you prioritise?
- Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What do you know of the area and community in which our company is located?
- Can you work well to deadlines and under pressure?
- If you were offered this role, what would you expect to achieve in the first year?
- What hours would you like to work?
- How do you believe the performance of the NZ dollar impacts on our organisation?
- Tell me about a time when you have been managed in a good or bad way.
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
- What problems do you feel you will have fitting into the job?
- Do you know the location of our head office?
- What interests you about our product/services? How would you improve them?

Work Experience

Do you take responsibility for your own learning and career development? Do you have an understanding of the type of environments in which you are most effective?

- Tell me about the best job you've ever had.
- What did you enjoy most or least about your last job?
- What relevant work experiences have you had?
- What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?
- What kind of office equipment/technical equipment have you used?
- Have you ever been the leader of a team? What did you like and dislike about the role?

Academic Experience

An opportunity to find out about you as a person and encourage you to discuss two subjects that you are the authority on, YOU and your studies. If continuing study for professional qualifications or certification is expected then the employer may check that you have effective work and study habits.

- Tell me about your academic programme at university.
- How did you reach the decision to study at Victoria?
- Describe your most rewarding university experience.
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- What led you to choose your field or major study?
- What college subjects did you like best/least? Why?
- What changes would you make at your university? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued study?
- Do you think that your grades are an accurate reflection of your academic ability?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?

Ability, Competence and Achievement

A chance to discover what inspires you and motivates you to achieve and whether you are a loner or a team person.

- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe a time when you led or motivated others.
- What do you feel qualifies you for this position?
- Tell us about a time when you had more to do than you could complete in the time allocated: tell us what you did about it and what the outcome was.

Stress Questions

Designed to test your resilience in the work environment. Are you able to maintain appropriate behaviour in the face of what may seem inappropriate behaviour in others? Are you able to keep inappropriate emotions in check and take responsibility for your own performance?

- How do you react to criticism?
- Can you accept criticism for poor work?
- Describe a time you failed.
- What causes you to lose your temper?
- Do you really feel that you have enough experience for this role?
- Aren't you overqualified for this role?
- Why have you decided to change careers?
- Why have you changed jobs frequently?
- Have you ever been sacked (fired)?
- Why should I hire you?
- What if I told you that you'd work very hard, but recognition of your contributions would be nil?
- How long would you expect to remain with this organisation?
- What salary are you expecting?
- How long do you see yourself staying with us?
- Are there any questions you were expecting that we haven't asked?
- Tell me about your diary commitments from Monday to Friday of this week?
- How would you describe your work style?
- How would you describe your personality type?

Some 'Interesting' Interview Questions

Often asked by employers to add a bit of interest or inspiration to the interview process to see how you cope with the unexpected or a change in direction. Tend not to have a right or wrong answer.

- What is the most difficult issue facing NZ today?
- It is the 15th Century. How do you convince the Pope that the Earth is round?
- If I gave you an elephant, where would you hide it?
- Why are soda cans tapered on the top and bottom?
- You are in a boat on a fresh water lake. In your hand is a rock. You throw the rock into the lake. How is the lake's water level affected?
- Describe your best friend and what he or she does for a living.
- In what ways are you similar or different from your best friend?
- If you had a weekend to spend doing anything you wanted, how would you make the most of the time?

Prepared by:
Victoria University of Wellington
Career Development and Employment,
PO Box 600, 14 Kelburn Parade, Wellington
Tel: 0-4-463 5393, Fax: 0-4-463 5234
www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/careers/
FP1201

Assistance with career planning and job searching techniques is available from Careers staff.

