



# Interview Success Guide

## ABOUT [CAREER STORY](#)

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## Tell Me about Yourself

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A seemingly innocent, yet common interview question that often proves challenging to answer. The key here is to **stay focused on providing an answer that is targeted on the job that you are applying for**. Your entire response should be **less than one minute** or you may lose the attention of the hiring manager.

Here is a simple formula that will help you create a targeted answer:

### Present - Past - Future

1. Who You Are (Present)
2. Previous Experiences, Strengths, and Success (Past)
3. Why You Are Here (Future)



### Sample Responses

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**Sample 1:** I am an inside sales representative and account manager with over 10 years of experience helping small businesses increase their customer base and engagement. One of the achievements that I am proudest of was growing a customer base from 10 existing customers to over 200 repeat customers. A strength that makes me effective in this role is the personable and proactive way that I work with customers to quantify their needs and build relationships. At this point, I am excited to explore this position as I believe it will build on my experience in the marine industry while also allowing me to take on new challenges.

**Sample 2:** I have provided meticulous oversight and clear leadership to the accounts payable process at PNP Construction Company as an accounts payable supervisor and business manager for the past 8 years. I processed over 400 invoices per day while also keeping careful track of equipment rentals and expense reports. While managing the day-to-day operations, I also implemented multiple process improvements and staff training initiatives, resulting in reduced processing time and higher accuracy. Though my work has ended with PNP due to a major project completion, I am excited to apply my skills and energy to a new position.

## Behavior-Based Questions

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The behavior-based question is based on a simple premise – your past experience will indicate your future actions. Generally, these questions will start with, **“Tell me about a time...”** or **“Can you give me an example when...”**

**You need to provide concrete examples** of what you have done in the past. Avoid speaking in generalities. One of the best ways you can prepare for behavior-based question is to brainstorm 10 - 15 situations from your career that stand out. These could be specific projects, situations, successes, or accomplishments. Then focus on preparing one example for each of these common types of behavior-based questions:

1. Teamwork
2. Problem-solving
3. Leadership/Initiative
4. Interpersonal Skills
5. Challenge/Pressure

As with any interview question, **it is critical to stay focused providing an answer that relates to the position you are applying for.**

When answering a behavior-based question, keep this simple acronym in mind:



**S. T. A. R.**

1. Situation
2. Task
3. Approach
4. Result

### Sample Questions and Answers

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**Tell me about a time that you faced a challenge in your work.**

While at ABC Productions, we organized a creative photo shoot which involved over 30 individuals including models, make-up artists, set designers, and the photographer. We had arranged for a unique venue at a cemetery, but when we arrived, we were told that we could not use the location. I stepped in immediately and identified an alternative venue close by. Throughout the process, I ensured strong communication with everyone involved and quickly organized transportation to get everyone over the new site. As a result, our shoot

was slightly delayed, but we were able to get back on track relatively quickly and in the end, I am proud of the images that came out of this photo shoot.

**Tell me about a time when you worked with a difficult team member.**

When working for the municipal government, I worked within a small team where one team member seemed resentful of my presence and often expressed herself in an abrupt manner. I tried not to take her words or actions too personally and I intentionally started to go to her with questions related to my work. I found that she appreciated being an expert and over time, our relationship improved significantly. I learned a lot from her and when I announced my resignation, she was the one who seemed most upset about me leaving.

**Behavior-Based Question Samples**

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- Describe a situation where you disagreed with a supervisor.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem.
- Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time where you had to delegate tasks during a project
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment.
- Describe your most disappointing and frustrating experience in gaining the support of others for an idea or proposal.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work hard in order to fully understand what another person was saying to you.
- Describe the last time you did something that went well beyond expectations.
- **Tell me about a time when you dealt effectively with conflict.**
- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation that you have completed.
- Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
- Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
- Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.

## What is your weakness?

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One of the most common interview questions and one that you need to have a good answer for! Keep in mind that it is important that you are honest and stay away from cliches such as “I am a perfectionist” or “I work too hard.”

Generally, when answering this question, here’s what you would want to communicate.

1. **State your weakness** – it needs to be genuine yet something that you can improve on.
2. Describe what you are doing about it. **How are you trying to fix it?**
3. Ensure that it will not impact your ability to do the job!

**Sample answer:** One of my challenges is that I am a fairly straight-forward communicator. I tend to say what I think and will generally voice my opinion. In general, this communication style works for me as many of my colleagues have expressed that they appreciate my authenticity and directness. However, I have learned that some people may find this style of communication to be blunt and I have realized that I need to be aware of when I need to be more tactful and discrete. As I have progressed in my career, I have started to tune into what type of communication style would work best in different situations. I now try to alter the way that I share information and ideas depending on what is required.

## What are your strengths?

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In preparation for your interview, you need to be able to communicate your key strengths and core ways that you can add value – **make sure that you have brainstormed at least three strengths that could be used for this particular job.**

Use these questions to help identify what your strengths may be.

- What is one of the biggest challenges that you have encountered in your career? How did you get through it?
- What do people normally compliment you on within a work environment?
- What are you most proud of in your past work experience?
- How would a colleague or manager describe you or your working style?
- How can you help a company generate revenue, save money, solve a problem, or support the company’s mandate?



## Why do you want to work for our company?

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This question is about you, but it is also about the company. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to focus exclusively on what you want the company to do for you. **You need to focus on how you can help the company** and demonstrate that you would be a good fit within the company culture.

The company is also looking to see that you have done your research and are interested in working for them in particular! Avoid simply reciting anything off their website! Before your interview, try to find as much information as possible through research and talking to people who are connected to the company. When you answer this question, do the following:

1. **Share what you know about the company.** Try to figure out what the company culture might be like and what their corporate values may be.
2. Identify what skills and values that you can offer. **Show how you think you can fit in** and where you think you can add contribute to the company!

## Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

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The interviewer is trying to get a sense of your commitment level and motivation through this question. If this position is just an interim position for you, do not share this with the interviewer. For this question, **communicate your desire to build a career.** You may share that you want to move into management or develop more skills within your field. For this question, you can also mention how you might see an **alignment with the company's values and your own.**

## Gaps

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The reality is that you may be more worried about a gap on your resume than an employer. When trying to answer questions about gaps on your resume, keep these tips in mind.

1. **Be honest**, but don't feel that you need to share everything.
2. **Show that you kept busy** during the gap time. In particular, you may want to share about any volunteer work you have done, courses you took, or other ways that you tried to enhance your professional development.
3. Don't make excuses, but rather **stay positive** and share what your gap time has taught you!
4. **Focus on the job** and how you can contribute now that you are ready to go back to work!

## Difficult Endings

Be prepared to talk about why you left your last job. If you were fired, you need to make sure that you have an answer that you are comfortable with. And make sure that you practice it a lot!



Things to keep in mind:

- **Keep your response neutral** and don't say anything negative about the company or the person who fired you.
- **Leave your emotions out** – make sure you practice your response to ensure you don't get triggered by anything you say.
- **Be honest** that you were terminated as a reference check might turn up this information anyway.
- Give just enough information so that the story makes sense, but **don't share more than you need to**.
- Look for opportunity to **shift the focus to your skills and strengths**.

So a sample response might be:

My job at ABC Company ended as I was terminated (**honest**). The company had brought in new management a few months ago and though I tried hard to get along with my new manager, it seemed that our personalities were quite different and in the end, she didn't feel we could work together productively anymore. (**staying neutral, keeping the story short and avoiding being negative about your manager**) This was quite difficult for me as I had been with ABC Company for over 5 years and had received good performance reviews from my previous bosses. One of the most difficult parts of my termination is that I miss the work I was doing in customer service and in particular, the relationships that I have built with long-term customers. (**Your skills and strengths!**)

*All endings are also beginnings,  
we just don't know it at the time.  
– Mitch Albom*

## Situational Questions

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Situational questions ask about **hypothetical situations that may occur** in the job you are applying for. When asking these questions, the hiring manager is looking to see your **decision-making and problem-solving approach as well as your ethical orientation**. These questions may also be used to evaluate company culture fit. Here are a few situational questions to familiarize yourself to:

- Team members you've been assigned to lead during a new project object to your vision and ideas for implementation. What specifically would you do to address their objections?
- You're responsible for an important project near completion but receive another important project that must be completed immediately. How do you multi-task and prioritize?
- When a subordinate is performing below average, what specific steps do you take to correct the problem?
- You're responsible for ensuring a large amount of work is finished before the end of the New Year. A subordinate decides to use sick hours to take an entire week of work off. What would you do to address the problem?
- What would you do if you realized a project you completed just before deadline did not meet all of the project specifications?
- Suppose you don't see eye to eye with your supervisor on how to deal with a problem? How would you handle the situation?
- If hired, what steps would you take to make important job-related decisions?
- What would you do if you knew your boss was absolutely wrong about an important work related issue?
- Describe how you would handle the situation if you met resistance when introducing a new idea or policy to a team or work group.
- How would you handle it if you believed strongly in a recommendation you made in a meeting, but most of your co-workers shot it down?
- In a training session, you find that the trainer has a thick accent, and you can't understand what's being said. What would you do?
- List the steps that you would take to make an important decision on the job.



## Questions to Ask

When the interviewer asks if you have any questions, make sure that you have prepared at least 5 questions in advance. You should have time to ask 2-3 questions – pick your favorites. These questions should reflect that you have done your research, but should not be overly complex.

1. What do you like best about working for this company?
2. If I was given this job, what would be the top 2 key area I would need to focus on first to be effective in this job?
3. What would an average day look like for this role?
4. What do most people find challenging about this role?
5. Can I ask why this position is open?
6. If I was successful in this job, what would that look like?
7. How is performance measured for this role?
8. Who would I be working closely with in this role?
9. How would you describe the company's corporate culture?
10. If there any other information that I can provide you with to help with your hiring decision?
11. What type of training is normally given to someone starting in this role?
12. **What is the next step in this process? Would it be OK if I followed up with you? (Always ask this question!)**

## Ending

The interview is over! Hopefully, it went well. Be sure to include these elements to avoid any awkwardness.

4. Thank you!
5. Handshake
6. Interest: Express your interest in the position.
7. Name: The name that the interviewer used to introduce themselves
8. Card: If you do not already have a business card for your interviewer, you may want to ask for one so that you can follow-up

## Sample Response

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Thank you so much for meeting with me today, Ms. Jones. I enjoyed our conversation and I want express how very interested I am in the position. Would it be possible to get your business card? And if you have any further questions regarding my application, please don't hesitate to reach out.

## References

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If you would like help with preparing for an upcoming interview, Career Story can help. We provide [interview preparation coaching](#) and support. You can contact us at [info@careerstory.ca](mailto:info@careerstory.ca).