



## WATCH Project



Building Pathways to a Brighter Future

# Job Search Series



## Interviewing: Preparation is the Key Part 2

### Participant Packet

**Sharon McIntyre**  
WATCH Project Career Coordinator

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## **WATCH Core Mission**

The **Work Attributes Toward Careers in Health** Project provides a variety of academic and social support services to income-eligible individuals in a ten-county region to enter or move up in a high-priority health care career. Meeting local health care industry needs, the program increases skills, provides critical services and moves participants toward self-sufficiency.

The WATCH Project assists students in preparing for careers as:

- Direct Care Workers (DCW)**
- Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA)**
- Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN)**
- Registered Nurses (RN)**
- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT)**
- Paramedics (EMT-P)**
- Pharmacy Technicians**

A five-year Health Profession Opportunity Grant from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the WATCH Project is administered by the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit.

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# Interviewing: Preparation is the Key

## Part 2

Think of an employer with whom you would like to interview. Imagine the interviewer asking you the same questions Moriah was asked. How would you respond? Prepare your responses to the following common interview questions.

### 1. Tell me about yourself.

*List at least two relevant details about your recent education and past/current jobs.*

1.

2.

*Why did you decide to enter the health care field in the first place?*

### 2. When you have a lot of work to do and not enough time or assistance to get it done, how do you handle it?

**When this happened to me in the past, I:**

**3. Give an example of a time you did something on the job without being asked.**

*Specific example: Moriah said she put a bulletin board at work where everyone could write their availability to be “called in” and she kept it updated.*

**4. Why do you want to work here?**

*List at least two specific reasons why you would like to work for this employer. Research the organization online, through brochures, and by talking to others who work there to discover these reasons.*

**5. Why did you leave your last position?**

*Please refer to the handout “Reasons For Leaving” to find positive words to answer this question. Do not complain about former employers.*

**6. Describe a situation when you had to solve a problem on a job.**

*How have you made the job/position better since you were hired? Or how did you help a patient/resident or co-worker with a problem that made their situation better?*

**7. What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

<b>My Strengths</b>	<b>Examples for Previous Jobs / Experiences</b>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

<b>My Weaknesses</b>	<b>How I Am Working on Them</b>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

**8. Do you have any questions for me?**

*Please refer to the handout "Questions You Can Ask at an Interview" for examples.  
Also, use your research about the facility, agency, or organization to create questions.*

# Reasons for Leaving

- ❖ Seeking advancement
- ❖ Career change
- ❖ Seasonal
- ❖ Temporary
- ❖ Relocation
- ❖ Reduction in workforce
- ❖ Economy slowed
- ❖ Business closed
- ❖ Job ended
- ❖ Family needed me  
(no longer a problem; issue resolved)
- ❖ Health or injury  
(health issue resolved)

## Questions That You Can Ask At an Interview

1. What are the job duties or responsibilities of the position?
  - Could you give me a detailed job description?
  - May I have a copy of the job description?
  
2. Can you tell me why this position became available?
  - What happened to the previous employee or is this position new?
  - How long has this position been open?
  
3. What would you like done differently by the next person that fills this position?
  - What are your expectations of me if I get the position?
  - What are some of the short- and long-term goals and objectives you would like achieved in this job?
  
4. What are some difficult challenges that I would face in this position?
  
5. How would you describe an ideal candidate for this position?
  
6. May I have a business card?
  
7. Would it be possible to have a tour of the facility?
  
8. What do you like most about working for this company?

9. To whom would I report?

Please describe the management style of my supervisor.

10. Are there any special clearances or certifications needed for this position?

11. How is an employee evaluated?

- When do you evaluate employee performance?
- How are employees given feedback about their performance?

12. May I provide you with additional information?

For example: a copy of my references, diploma, certificates, previous evaluations or letters of recommendation

13. When will you be making a decision?

How would you prefer I follow up with you after the interview?  
(by telephone, email, etc.)

**Do not** ask about insurance benefits, vacation, medical leave, paid time off or salaries until you have been offered a position.

# What is the STAR Method for Answering Tough Interview Questions?

The “STAR” method:

**S** – Situation, background set the scene

**T** – Task or Target, specifics of what's required, when, where, who

**A** – Action, what you did, skills used, behaviors, characteristics

**R** – Result – Outcome, what happened?

I cannot stress how valuable learning this question answering technique will be for you.

**Life changing** may sound like an exaggeration, but if you don't know it...

Yes, I feel life changing is an accurate description of what this can do for you.

The STAR method technique will enable you to answer tough work-related questions (not limited to job interviews) in a subtly compelling and powerful manner.

People like hearing stories. Facts are easier to remember if wrapped in a story. Stories do not get interrupted. Basically, stories are an ancient, proven method of getting a message across!

Listeners will remember more of your answers and the messages within them, yet your message will be delivered in a friendly, likable style.

As far as job interviewing is concerned, your success ratio will go off the scale.

## How to Build a STAR Method Story

A STAR story should be about two minutes long and be delivered with energy and enthusiasm about a real experience. It does not have to be a work experience, as long as it describes a relevant skill or behavior.

Time for an example:

***Question: Have you ever lead a team before?***

This is another reason why the STAR method is so powerful. The above question is a terrible, closed question. You could answer “yes” or “yes, on three separate occasions” and move quickly on to the next question.

But leadership is an important skill, and you **must** not miss this chance to shine.

A lot of folks would give the easy answer here. You have a great chance to impress and basically do all the interviewers' work for them.

Let's build a STAR Method story answer.

**(Situation)** "Yes, a relevant example being at my last company, where I was initially a software developer, in a team of six, developing a new finance module for our core accounting product."

**(Task)** "The project was critical as launch dates had been set with a lot of sales and marketing investment riding on the product being ready. However, the project was behind schedule when our team leader unfortunately became ill and had to leave."

**(Action)** "I had been sports team captain at school, where I loved the challenge and responsibility of leadership. So I volunteered to stand in. Using my technical analysis skills, I spotted a few small mistakes made in the initial coding that were causing the sporadic errors and slowing us down. I then negotiated a small bonus incentive for the team and budget for two pizza evenings with our product director so we could pull a couple of late-night shifts to correct the coding and catch up with the critical project landmarks."

**(Result)** "Though this took us 1.5% over budget, the software was delivered on time with a better-than-target fault tolerance. The project was seen as a great success as the additional project cost was minimal compared to the costs of delaying the launch, and the negative effect on our product branding. The team was delighted with the extra bonus and I was officially promoted to team leader as a result."

You need to practice your answers out loud to ensure continuity and that you don't go over two minutes.

The example above not only answers the leadership question asked but also conveys that you have other skills and behaviors any interviewer would be interested in.

Answering tough interview questions like this will work wonders, but answering poorly worded questions will really set you apart.

### **Source:**

*What is the STAR Method for Answering Tough Interview Questions?* (n.d.). Retrieved July 13, 2015, from <http://www.idemployee.id.tue.nl/g.w.m.rauterberg/jobs/STAR-method.pdf>

### **Reference:**

*Utilizing the STAR Method in Your Resume and Interviews.* (n.d.). Retrieved July 13, 2015, from <https://warrington.ufl.edu/graduate/gbcs/docs/STARmethod.pdf>

# How to Answer Interview Questions Using the STAR Technique

The acronym STAR stands for:

S = Situation  
T = Task  
A = Actions  
R = Results

You may sometimes see references to the PAR interviewing technique. This is the same thing, with P for Problem.

Listen to each question carefully and then give a response that covers STAR, even if it is a closed question you could easily answer “yes” or “no.” Your response may involve either a situation or a task. For example, if you are asked a question about dealing with a difficult coworker, you can describe a similar situation in the past. If you are asked a question about how you would go about cutting costs, you could describe a similar task that you did in the past.

<b>STAR</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Situation</b>	Give a specific example of a situation related to the question.
<b>Task</b>	Describe a task that needed to be accomplished.
<b>Actions</b>	Explain the actions you carried out related to the situation or task.
<b>Results</b>	Explain the results of your actions.

## Example Interview Answer Using STAR

Imagine a candidate interviewing for a management job in a fast food restaurant. He is asked the question: “Have you ever had to deal with a difficult customer?”

The candidate could give a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Or he could give a general answer like: “Yes, I dealt with difficult customers on a regular basis.”

But he should use the STAR approach to give a detailed, specific and impressive answer.

STAR	Answer
<b>Situation or Task</b>	I was a supervisor in a coffee shop. A staff member prepared a customer's coffee incorrectly. The customer was in a hurry to get back to work, so he was very angry. I immediately became aware of the problem and stepped in to resolve it. This was a regular customer and I did not want to lose him.
<b>Actions</b>	I remained calm and apologized to the customer. I verified the order with him and quickly prepared the correct order myself. I apologized again for the mix-up and offered him a coupon for his next visit.
<b>Result</b>	The man calmed down. He was grateful to me for quickly correcting his order and for the coupon. He thanked me and left with a smile.

This response is far more effective than a vague or general response. It proves that the job candidate has the experience, knowledge and skills to deal with similar situations in the future.

## Behavioral Interview Techniques – The STAR Approach

<b>Situation or Task</b>	Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<b>Action you took</b>	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
<b>Results you achieved</b>	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Use examples from internships, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience -- anything really -- as examples of your past behavior. In addition, you may use examples of special accomplishments, whether personal or professional, such as scoring the winning touchdown, being elected president of your Greek organization, winning a prize for your artwork, surfing a big wave, or raising money for charity. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers always impress employers.

Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to *negative* situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or -- better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

Here's a good way to prepare for behavior-based interviews:

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use fairly recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Accenture, in fact, specifies that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form and/or PAR/SAR/STAR.

To cram for a behavioral interview right before you're interviewed, review your resume. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory.

In the interview, listen carefully to each question, and pull an example out of your bag of tricks that provides an appropriate description of how you demonstrated the desired behavior. With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of different behavioral questions.

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## How to Behave in a Behavior-Based Interview

*Lombardi, who earned a master's degree in industrial organizational psychology from West Chester University, wrote his thesis on behavior-based interviewing. Now he's a college relations specialist at Kulicke & Soffa Industries Inc., based in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, and he says his background has helped him understand an interviewing technique that has become increasingly popular and, according to both his research and popular opinion, more effective than traditional techniques.*

"It seemed like the more structure and the more thought that was put into an interview, the better it was," he says.

Lombardi says behavior-based questions are generally designed to determine if a candidate possesses certain "key competencies."

"When I start any behavioral interview, I explain the process," Lombardi says. "I say, 'I'm going to be asking you for specific examples. I will be asking you for details, including names of people, dates, and outcomes.' I really like talking to people about lengthy projects they've had to do--how their role evolved, how they handled time deadlines, pressures, and unexpected situations, and especially how they handled any adversity...Everyone's got that kind of experience."

Lombardi says that the best way for students and new graduates to prepare for a behavior-based interview is to dig up old research papers, to think hard about any difficulties encountered in summer and part-time jobs, and to recount the steps it took to successfully complete school projects and projects that were part of internships or co-ops.

"What I would recommend is for them to just kind of think through situations that have occurred, projects they've worked on, specific experiences they've had," he says. "They should be able to talk about that in detail and be very specific. They should reread that term paper...A lot of it is just common sense."

Following is a list of typical behavior-based questions, courtesy of Lombardi and *The Ultimate Job Search Kit* by Damir Joseph Stimac. Competencies sought by the interviewer are listed in parentheses:

1. Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read? (research/written communication)
2. Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others? (oral communication)
3. Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result? (assertiveness)
4. Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused? (commitment to task)
5. Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play? (creativity and imagination)
6. Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome? (decision making)
7. Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome? (teamwork)
8. Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn? (time management)
9. Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker or classmate understand a task. How did you assist them? What was the result? (flexibility)
10. Describe two specific goals you set for yourself and how successful you were in meeting them. What factors led to your success in meeting your goals? (goal setting)

## How do I prepare for a behavioral interview?

Companies that employ behavioral interviewing have predetermined the skill sets they require for a particular position. These skill sets could include: decision making and problem solving, leadership, motivation, communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organization, critical thinking skills, team building and the ability to influence others. The company determines the skill sets by doing a detailed analysis of the position they are seeking to fill. Job seekers also must go through this same process. To conduct a job analysis the job seeker should ask questions such as:

1. What are the necessary skills to do this job?
2. What makes a successful candidate?
3. What would make an unsuccessful candidate?
4. Why have people left this position previously?
5. What is the most difficult part of this job?

Once you have landed the interview, keep in mind the following points. Be detailed and specific. You should have developed three stories that illustrate your past performance. Remember that the interviewer will be operating under the premise that "past performance in a similar setting is the best predictor of future performance."

The best way to accomplish this is to use the three-step STAR process or

1. Situation or Task
2. Action
3. Result or outcome

For example, you might recount a time when communication within your work group had broken down (situation). To resolve the problem, you organized informal lunch meetings for people to discuss relevant issues (action). Morale then improved, as did the lines of communication (result). Using this three step STAR process is a powerful way for you to frame your experiences and accomplishments for the interviewer.

- Limit rambling and tangents. While you can't control what is asked, you can control what you say.
- Listen carefully to each question. If you are unsure, rephrase the question and ask for clarification. When you respond, be sure to recall your past accomplishments in detail.
- Practice your behavioral stories using real-life examples. It is very difficult to make up behavioral stories, which is why behavioral interviewing is becoming more popular. By practicing, you will be able to recall with confidence your past accomplishments.

### Communication

- Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others?
- How do you ensure that someone understands what you are saying?
- Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information.

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- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important point.

### **Decision Making**

- Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision.
- Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?
- Give me an example of when taking your time to make a decision paid off.

### **Initiative**

- What did you do to prepare for this interview?
- Give me an example of a situation that could not have happened successfully without you being there.

### **Planning and Organization**

- Describe a situation when you had many projects due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give me an example.

### **Flexibility**

- Describe a time where you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker understand a task. How did you assist them? What was the result?

### **Leadership**

- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- Give me an example of when you involved others in making a decision.

### **Time Management**

- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective on prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule.