

Section 4

Researching Your Background

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As mentioned in Section 3, to begin your interview preparation you must research yourself. In this section, we will help you prepare for some common interview questions, review the STAR format, and provide space to begin writing down your best examples from your military career. We will only be jotting down the key words to remind you of these stories and will associate them to common interview topics. We strongly recommend that you write out your interview answers in order to think through them fully. This should be done outside of this workbook format.

The purpose behind having specific examples prepared is that it allows you to be able to effectively communicate your best selling points and career achievements, regardless of the question that is asked. Having a repertoire of solid stories is one of the greatest resources that you can have as you prepare for interviews - instead of just giving your theory behind a topic, you can show how you have put those thoughts into practice in real world experiences. Good examples will also help differentiate you and your potential competition.

Tell Me About Yourself

One of the more predictable yet important questions you can prepare for is “Tell me about yourself.” It is important because it will set the tone for your interview. This is a predictable question most employers will ask, or a similarly phrased question, in an effort to assess your ability to effectively communicate your background and experience. Because this is one of the first questions asked in an interview, you should develop an impactful answer. Your answer must illustrate what about you is advantageous for the company you are interviewing with. An effective answer will highlight your skills and strengths and give an employer an insight into your decision making processes. The best answer to this question will also be tailored for that employer and touch upon specific strengths and experiences which are particularly relevant to the position you are seeking. You’ll want to have a transitional statement to close your answer, letting them know why you are transitioning from the service or your current role (always be positive) and what you are looking for in your next career. You must be enthusiastic and confident in your answer.

The best answers for this question are well rehearsed. Spend some time to build a good outline of the key points and practice your answer. Saying an answer out loud is particularly effective. Done well, this question can really get an interview off to a great start! The manager should be excited that what you just told them really demonstrates you could be a great fit for the job.

The below worksheets will help you expand and organize your, “tell me about yourself,” response. Pay special attention to the items that you choose to highlight by ensuring that each item is relevant to your career. Highlighting key accomplishments and achievements will help to guide the interview in a positive direction.

Tell Me About Yourself

- 2 – 3 minute overview of your skills
- Key Selling Points
- Solid Transitions
- Why are you here today?

Starting Point: _____

Highlight 1: _____

Highlight 2: _____

Highlight 3: _____

Highlight 4: _____

Current Situation: _____

Why are you looking? _____

The STAR Format

When developing examples from your career that will highlight the skills, traits and experiences that are commonly explored in interviews, you must utilize the STAR format to help you frame your answer effectively. The STAR Format is:

Situation. The situation is the background story to the example that you are about to provide. Where were you? Who were you with? At what point in your career did this example occur? Paint a solid picture for the interviewer so they can relate to the rest of your story.

Task. The task can be referred to in several ways. The mission you were assigned. The problem that you had to solve. The challenge that you were facing. You need to make it clear to the interviewer what task you were working to complete.

Actions. The Actions are the steps that you took to accomplish the task, or solve the problem that you described above. Be specific! Make it clear to the interviewer what YOU did. You cannot speak in generalities here, because the interviewer will not understand the depth of your experience and thus will not be able to evaluate you effectively.

Results. You seal a solid STAR format interview response with quantifiable results. Were your actions successful in accomplishing the Task? How successful? Can you provide numbers that prove the level of your success? These are key steps to consider.

The STAR format is an extremely useful tool intended to ensure that you can communicate your background clearly for the interviewer. We are not looking to provide the content of your interview answer, but rather to ensure that the experiences that you have are articulated clearly, allowing the interviewer to effectively evaluate your experience and skill sets against the position.

Keys to Success

When considering what examples that you want to use as you start laying out your experiences, consider the following pointers:

Start by taking an inventory of your most marketable and relevant traits and strengths. Here are a few examples: Technical Skills (electronics, electrical, mechanical), Quality Assurance, Supervision, Leadership, Process Improvement, Innovation, Goal Oriented, Overcoming Obstacles, ability to learn quickly and adapt, ability to lead and motivate a team to accomplish great things.

Once you have taken inventory of yourself and your experience, focus on developing your best STAR format examples, regardless of interview question / topic. Your best examples will be impactful, and typically will relate to several common interview topics. Develop your best examples first, and then see what interview topics they match up with.

Avoid examples that do not translate well to civilian careers, such as targeting or eliminating insurgents. While you can be proud of your military accomplishments and there is no doubt that the planning and leadership that you used to achieve these tasks is relevant, the shock value of such statements may concern the interviewer. Soften the terminology and translate the experience to fit for the general population.

Focus on what you specifically did in your career. As Veterans, we often push recognition down to our team. That is a quality that translates into the private sector, but the employer in the interview is looking to hire you, not your team. They want to know what you specifically did to accomplish your tasks and achieve results.

Identifying Your Examples

Many candidates prepare for interviews by focusing on a list of interview questions and working to develop an answer for each of them. This can be helpful, and we will provide dozens of sample questions to work on, but we strongly suggest that you focus on your background first. What are your best stories? If you know your background well and focus on what interview topics your best experiences associate to, you can put yourself in a position to answer any question.

The Orion Team suggests that you use your resume, evaluations, awards, certifications and any other background documentation to assist you in identifying your key experiences and selling points. Fill out the background worksheet on the next page, and then use the STAR format to develop your examples.

Maintenance 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Troubleshooting 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Problem Solving 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Improving Performance 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Significant Achievement 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Process Improvement 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Sold Idea or Influenced Others 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Strengths 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Weakness 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Failure 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Conflict – Peer / Junior 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Conflict - Senior 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

Developing Your Examples

The worksheets on the following pages will help you expand your experiences developed earlier in this section utilizing the STAR format. Pay special attention to the Actions that you took to accomplish your Results. These are key areas to an effective interview. Note that we have only included one form for each topic. Utilize your own worksheets for additional examples.

Once you have sketched out your STAR format for these key examples, write out these stories in a narrative format, and then practice out loud. Verbalizing your answers will ensure a well-rounded, detailed story that can be adjusted to fit the question asked.

Our next section will expand on specific questions that are often asked in the interview process. Once you have a solid understanding of what makes a good interview response, write out your answers in detail and then practice them out loud!

Maintenance

- You maintained equipment.
- Required you to overcome an obstacle.
- Demonstrates your knowledge.
- Details a significant accomplishment.

Example: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Troubleshooting

- You troubleshoot and repaired equipment.
- Required you to overcome an obstacle.
- Demonstrates your knowledge.
- Details a significant accomplishment.

Example:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Problem Solving

- Set the stage and clearly define the problem
- Focus on what *you* did, even if part of a team – explain your thought process within the problem
- What was the result of solving the problem?

Problem:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Improving Performance

- Do not criticize or talk down. Focus on your people skills.
- Quantify if possible to show performance before and after your actions.

Poor Performer: _____**Situation:** _____
_____**Task:** _____
_____**Actions:** _____
_____**Results:** _____
_____**Significant Achievement**

- Occurred over an extended period of time.
- Demonstrates your ability to learn new skills and use resources effectively.
- Is NOT something that numerous other applicants have done (graduating, getting married, etc).

Achievement: __ Situation: _____**Task:** _____
_____**Actions:** _____
_____**Results:** _____

Process Improvement

- Examples where you recognized an inefficiency
- Systems that you created or actions that you took to improve this inefficiency
- Is the new process still being used? Do you have a measure of effectiveness?

Process: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Sold an Idea / Influenced Others

- Try to show your understanding of the sales process in your answer. Not just jamming your idea down someone's throat. Show that you first sought to understand the problem and what the decision maker wanted or needed and then developed a solution to meet those needs. Explain the benefits your solution delivered.

Sold Idea: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Strengths

- What are your strengths and how have you used them in your career?
- Demonstrate how your strengths were effective with an example.
- Relate to the position.

Strength:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Weakness

- An ongoing challenge you have worked to overcome (through training, planning, controls, etc.)
- The Actions are the steps you took to improve upon your weakness.

Weakness:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Failure

- Not mission critical or with severe consequences
- Own up to it
- What did you learn from the situation? How have you used the lessons learned to be successful since?

Failure:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Dealing with Conflict with a Peer or between Subordinates

- Do not speak negatively. Focus on people skills.
- When / How did you deal with it?
- What did you learn from the situation?

Conflict:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:

Dealing with Conflict with a Supervisor

- Do not speak negatively. Focus on people skills.
- What did you learn from the situation? Did you still accomplish the mission?

Conflict:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:
