

The Teldar Group Interview Prep Guide

How to Prepare and Stand Out in a Job Interview

Most candidates do not adequately prepare for interviews. A lot of professionals take the attitude of “I am a polished executive. I am an expert in procurement & supply chain. Therefore, my expertise should carry me through the interview”. However, in our professional experience, very often it isn’t the best candidate that usually gets the job. It’s the candidate that was the best prepared. One mistake in the interview process can kill the candidate’s chances for the position. We have designed a comprehensive guide to prepare you for the interview and avoid the common mistakes made by candidates in this crucial part of the process.

There are six areas that this guide covers to prepare you for interviewing:

1. Preparing & Answering Interview Questions
2. Energy & Enthusiasm
3. Pace
4. Addressing Weaknesses
5. Asking Questions
6. Interview Checklist

1. Preparing & Answering Interview Questions

There are three types of interview questions that clients typically ask:

- a) Typical HR interview questions.
 - “What are you looking for in a new opportunity?”
 - “Why are you looking for a new position?”
- b) Behavioral Questions, otherwise known as “tell me about a time” questions.
 - “Tell me about a time when you had a difficult stakeholder that wouldn’t cooperate and what you did to get them engaged on the project?”
- c) Case interview questions. Interviewers give candidates a brain teaser or an actual written case and ask them to solve the problem.

- “How many gas stations are there in the U.S.?”
- “Our client’s profitability is way down this year. Why is that?”

For the Typical HR Interview Questions (a), we recommend a structured response approach.

For the Behavioral Questions (b), we recommend the STAR method.

Case Interview Questions (c) are rare and we cover them in a different guide.

Structured Response Approach

One of biggest complaints we get from employers is that candidates ramble in interviews and can’t put structure around their answers. So what is structured thinking and answering? Here is an example to illustrate the point: I was role playing with a CPO candidate for a retained search.

“So, why are you looking for a new opportunity?” I asked. He hesitated... “We’ll, my company is experiencing financial difficulty, so I am worried about that”. He hesitated some more, “and I can’t move out of procurement at my company so there is no growth potential. And oh yeah, my wife doesn’t like the Midwest”.

Here was my answer using the same information but with more structure: “I am glad you asked that question. There are three reasons I am looking for a new opportunity. First, my company doesn’t move people to different functions so I have no career growth potential. In addition, my company is experiencing financial difficulty and quite frankly I am worried about our long term viability. The final reason is location. My wife hates the Midwest and we want to move back to the East Coast.”

Notice, I didn’t change any of the content. However, **I put some structure around the answer.** I framed my answer by saying there are three primary reasons for the change. Then I proceeded to list the three reasons in a concise matter with context. The CPO candidate rambled and was unprepared for the question.

This is a simple example of structure. However, there will be times when a more complicated structure is needed. Another question that comes up often is “What would you do in the first 90 days?” There are a lot of structures you could use to answer this question. One could be process, people, and technology. Another might a Porter five forces analysis. If you are a six sigma person, you might use

DMAIC. It doesn't matter what structure is employed as long as one is used and it is logical.

STAR Interview Method

The STAR method is best used for behavioral questions. These questions are fraught with peril as most candidates go off on tangents and ramble. The structure the Teldar Group recommends is the STAR Method. STAR stands for **Situation, Task, Action, & Result**. The best way to describe this method is through an example:

Question:

“Tell me about a time when you had a customer that was an obstacle on a sourcing project and how did you handle it.”

Answer:

Situation: At ABC Corporation, I was responsible for sourcing marketing spend. ABC had a decentralized procurement organization and we had to influence the stakeholders to get engaged in sourcing the spend. I was the team lead and had an analyst supporting me.

Task: We identified a huge opportunity in our advertising spend. We spent \$100 million in this area and it had never been strategically sourced. However, marketing owned this spend and viewed advertising as a sacred cow. Despite the fact that I had convinced senior management of the savings potential in this area, the Director of marketing was blocking our efforts by refusing to provide us spend information or even give us any time.

Action: By working with the CPO, I was able to get a joint meeting with the VP & Director of Marketing. His biggest concern was that we were going to pick the lowest bidder and he wouldn't have a say in the process. We convinced him that he would pick the supplier list to bid and would have the ultimate say in which agency to use. We were there to support his needs and at the end of the day, he was our customer. After that meeting, he became much more cooperative but still a little hesitant.

Result: We ended up saving over \$25 million from the incumbent supplier. After the process, the Director felt his current supplier was ripping off the company and he is now one of our biggest supporters. As a matter of fact, he has asked us to

look at three different spend areas in marketing to conduct strategic sourcing projects.

This provides a good example of how to use the STAR method. However, **there are several other types of questions that are asked in the interview process that you can employ this method to.** For example, an interviewer might ask “what are your biggest strengths?” When a candidate answers, they might say “I have great leadership skills.” Great! Did they prove it? It is one thing to say you are great at something. It is even stronger when you can provide an example that puts into context you demonstrating that trait. In addition, when you answer these questions it is important to include pertinent pieces of information on the project. They include: “what was the spend?” “What was your specific role on the project?” “Who were the key stakeholders i.e. VP of Manufacturing?”

Interview Preparation

Now that the interview strategy has been defined, you need to prepare to use this strategy. A couple days before the interview, concentrate on your previous experience and come up with 4-5 projects you worked on that were complex and had good results. Once you have identified these 4-5 projects, go back and read any old documentation you have to re-familiarize yourself with them. Now that you know five complex projects in depth, you can tailor these projects to any behavioral question that is asked. In addition, you need to prepare for the standard interview questions and how to handle them. I recommend you write all the obvious questions on a piece of paper and write down your answer. By writing your answers you will internalize them and be able to easier recall them when the questions are asked in the interview.

2. Energy & Enthusiasm

Another big complaint we get from clients is the lack of energy candidates possess. There are several candidates that had all of the qualifications for the role but lacked energy and ended up losing to another candidate that was less qualified. So, energy is very important. If you are on a phone interview, make sure you stand. When you stand, your voice carries more and you sound much more enthused. If you are on a site interview, make sure you have an extra coffee or the like. Have a little pep in your step. Be enthused. Believe me, this will make a big difference in your success rate.

3. Pace

Pace is very important in an interview. Usually, candidates blurt out answers immediately after the interviewer asks them. Candidates hate silence. However, sometimes taking a little time to collect your thoughts is the right move. Some

interview questions you should see coming a mile away, i.e. “Why are you looking?” Others might not be so obvious. On the tougher questions, pause for a second. Collect your thoughts. Then, using the advice mentioned earlier, apply some structure to your answer. The caveat here is to not pause for most of your questions. If you pause a little bit, it comes across as a polished executive. If you pause all the time, you come across as calculating and guarded. You need to walk a tightrope. On the obvious questions, be spontaneous. On the tougher ones, take your time.

4. Addressing Weaknesses

There is no such thing as a perfect candidate. They might not have enough experience, or the wrong experience, or too much experience. They might have had too many jobs, too few of jobs or not the right education, etc. The key for a candidate is to honestly look at their background and discover what their weakness is for the position. Keep in mind, this is the weakness as it relates to this specific job, not a general personal weakness. In addition, your Teldar Group recruiter should help identify what weaknesses you have. Once the weaknesses are identified, you need to craft a strategy to address them in the interview. Again, consult your Teldar Group recruiter on how to do this. Finally, one of the worst things that can happen is if you get a bad interviewer and your weakness never gets brought up in the interview. This happens often. Interviewers typically don't like asking tough questions. We have had numerous experiences where the candidate had a great explanation for the weakness. However, the interviewer never asked the question in the interview and the candidate didn't get the job because of it. So, how do you mitigate this risk? If the interview is winding down and they still have not asked about it, YOU need to find a way to introduce it in the conversation. Usually at the end of the meeting, the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions. This is the best time to bring it up. For example, we had a candidate that had three jobs in the last five years.

“One of things I want to bring up is that from my resume, you can see that I have had three jobs in five years. One of those positions, I left for a promotion. However, the other two positions, the companies laid off the whole department and outsourced it to India. I am not a job hopper. As a matter of fact, one of the key things I am looking for in my next position is stability and longevity. “

5. Asking Questions

It is important in any interview that you ask several questions. Some of these questions can be general like, “What is your company culture?” However, a good chunk of your questions should be specific to the company and the position. So, you need to do some homework before the interview. Check out

the company's website. Read their recent press releases. Talk to colleagues to find out more about the company. You need to prepare so you can ask insightful questions. In addition, we have included a great list of questions called "Interviewing the Interviewer"

"Me" Questions

The me questions. "What is the salary?" "How long before I get promoted?" "How much vacation do I get?" Etc. These are all important questions that need to get answered. However, there is an appropriate time and place for these questions and in the first couple of interviews, it is completely inappropriate. Interviewing is like dating. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered before you get married. However, if you asked all of them on the first date, there probably won't be a second date, even if that person might be your perfect match. Work with your Teldar Group recruiter to get these questions answered at the appropriate time.

6. Interview Checklist

Phone Interviews

- Have your resume in front of you
- Have a bullet list of the five projects you will use as examples
- Have the "Interviewing the Interviewer" questions out
- STAND, this will make a big difference

Site Interviews

- Dress professionally (dark suit and white shirt for men, dark suit or slacks and a high cut blouse for women)
- Arrive 15 minutes early
- Take extra copies of your resume
- Make eye contact but don't stare down the interviewer

After the Interview

- Send a thank you email to everyone you met

Action Items before the prep:

Be prepared to discuss the following interview questions in detail on the interview prep call with your Teldar Group recruiter:

1. Why are you looking to leave your current company?
2. Why are you interested in this role and our company?
3. Describe the strategic sourcing process you follow in detail

4. What are your salary expectations?

Wrapping up then, it is important to remember that preparation is the key to getting past the crucial interview stage. Most top candidates make the horrible mistake of believing that their many years of experience is all they will need in order to excel in an interview. Looking past the interview process – perhaps the most important process in making a career move – is a mistake that has cost many “A” players from moving towards receiving an offer. Remember, in our professional experience, very often it isn’t the best candidate that usually gets the job; It’s the candidate that was the best prepared.