

EXAMPLES – HOW TO ANSWER

Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.

DISCUSSION: This is a problem solving question that tests your critical thinking skills. This is a great question for showing that you are a creative and capable problem solver. The problem you select to use as an example should be as similar as possible to a problem that you are likely to face at the job you are interviewing for.

"I try to take a systematic approach to problem solving. I take the time to gather the relevant information and clearly define the problem or goal. I think it is important to get the information and clarify the problem first before you start coming up with possible solutions, or wasting other people's time. FOR EXAMPLE, when I was at Job "X" ... What kinds of challenges are YOU currently facing in your department? How tough a position does that put you in? What could the ideal candidate do to help solve this problem in their first couple months on the job?"

"Sure, at my last job we had a problem where the situation was "X" ... the action I took was "Y" ... and the positive outcome was "Z" ... I was commended by Susan in Accounting for solving the problem and getting the project back on track. I think that's the type of experience you are looking to bring to your team ... isn't it?"

"You would agree that having this type of experience will help me succeed in this position, wouldn't you?"

What did you like best and least about your previous job?

DISCUSSION: This question reveals a lot about you. You want to indicate that what you liked best about your last job are things that will appeal to the Hiring Manager. Show that your last job allowed you to demonstrate many of the desirable Behavioral Competencies that are discussed at the beginning of this Guide. Give specific examples of how your last job allowed you to flex your skills and show your maturity. Never make statements like "I like that my last company gave me a lot of vacation days," or something similar. When answering about what you liked least, keep it short, do not be negative, and relate your answer to how your last job limited you in your ability to exhibit positive Behavioral Competencies.

"What I liked about my last job was the fact that there was good on the job training. I was able to really develop my "X" skills, which I know will help me succeed here if I am fortunate enough to be able to join your team. What are the qualities and skills of the people who have been most successful at this company?"

"One thing I liked about my last job was that it allowed me to develop my leadership skills. FOR EXAMPLE, I was put in charge of a project where I had to earn the "buy-in" of people from multiple different departments — including Marketing, IT, Product Development, and even HR. I held all the responsibility for getting this project completed on time, even though I had no real authority over my teammates since they did not report to me. I was able to create a project vision that the team agreed on, and then day-to-day I made sure that each team member completed their work on time. I did this in most cases by appealing to my teammates' own self-interests. FOR EXAMPLE ... "

"Did I answer that question to your satisfaction?"

"What I liked least about my last job was that the management style was pretty hands off, and this was fine for me because I am self-motivated and work hard to achieve. But the lack of structure sometimes allowed some of my teammates to slack off from time to time — and I often ended up having to pick up the extra work. I would not mind that SOMETIMES, but it got old after a while. I had to constructively approach my manager and let her know what was going on WITHOUT creating any friction between me and the slacker teammates, who I actually liked as people. In the end, it worked out well, because I was pro-active. Have you ever run into that type of situation as a manager?"

What have you learned from your mistakes?

DISCUSSION: Show that you are able to learn from your mistakes, but don't offer up any negative examples concerning your past performance. Show that you have been successful, but that you have the maturity it takes to examine your own behavior so that you can learn and grow and be a better employee. Be brief.

"Good question. Well, I have been successful at every job I have had, but I have had the normal ups and downs. I'd say that I do actively try to monitor my work habits and the quality of my work so that I can constantly be improving myself. FOR EXAMPLE, I have had one or two hiccups with customers where their satisfaction was not where I thought it was. I learned that I have to really monitor certain difficult customers closely and "take their temperature" so I can keep their satisfaction level as high as possible. Have YOU had any customers like that here?"

Describe a situation when working with a team produced more successful results than if you had completed the project on your own.

DISCUSSION: This is a "behavioral interviewing" style of question. The Hiring Manager wants to learn more about your thought process, and how well you can form examples to answer this teamwork related question. You will want to show your ability to solicit ideas from others, listen carefully, and persuade people to your point of view.

"Well, I have worked both independently and as a member of team, throughout my career. I enjoy both, and I can do both equally well. I will have to say, though, that working with others has often yielded great results for projects I have worked on — specifically when it comes to brainstorming. I try to get everyone involved in coming up with new solutions by making time for sessions where "there are no wrong ideas or answers." The creativity of a group of people is always going to be greater than that of one person, and thus the results will be more successful. I did that a lot a Job "Y". FOR EXAMPLE ..."

"Working with others allows you data-mine other people's skills and experiences, get perspectives and ideas that you would not have on your own , and check the quality of your own work before it goes out the door. FOR EXAMPLE, at Job "X" I worked with many great people. I was able to "pick their brains" — so to speak — about the effectiveness of various techniques, estimates on how long it would take to get various things done, etc. — I would not have been able to do my job as effectively without them ... Will there be the opportunity to work in team situations at this job?"

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?

DISCUSSION: Workplace stress is an issue for everyone. Don't pretend that you never get stressed out. You want to show that you can deal with stress and cope with difficult situations. Show that you are calm under pressure, and know how to avoid stress in the first place through planning and time management.

"Well I think it is important to remember that stress effects everyone, and it is inevitable that sometimes people are going to have bad days. That is why I try to give people the benefit of the doubt when they seem to have a short fuse. What I do personally is try to control my response to a situation. You can't necessarily control what happens to you, but you CAN control your own response. What I try to do is lengthen the time between the stressful situation and my response — so that I can identify the cause of the stress and decide what I can do about it ... Would you say it is a stressful environment here? ... I see. I'm sure I can handle it. I have been tested like that before ... FOR EXAMPLE"

"FOR EXAMPLE, on several occasions I have had to deal with very irate customers who actually yelled at me. What I did was stay calm and not let them get under my skin. I really tried to listen and decide exactly what it was that was at the root of their problem. Then I provided solutions that could be completed within a specific time-frame. I always find that it is best to face those types of situations head-on and be objective about them. I do my best to be professional and not get my emotions involved. Also, I try to avoid stress in the first place by tackling difficult tasks or conversations sooner rather than later. Does that make sense? ... I hope I've answered that question to your satisfaction?"

What was your role in your department's most recent success?

DISCUSSION: You'll want to be very specific here, and frame your answer in terms of how you saved time and money. The Hiring Manager is looking for a pattern of success, and you need to describe recent successes in detail. Use the S.T.A.R. Statement formula for your examples. Be prepared with at least three examples concerning your recent successes, and make sure at least one of them relates to teamwork and something you accomplished as part of a group. Make sure you address how your work made other people FEEL, as well as the time you saved and the revenue or cost-savings you generated.

"I guess that would be a recent project for client "X." I handled all of the communication with the client for our last project. It was a three month long project where my team had to build a custom package based on the needs of client. I was instrumental in translating the client's business needs into detailed product features. I had to make sure that my team understood what the client wanted, and then check the quality to make sure that we were delivering a quality product with the features that the client was expecting."

"Well, it was an ongoing process that required a lot of communication and teamwork with my team as well as the client. I think my role really was to clarify the scope of the project, and then "manage the client's expectations." We were able to deliver on time, and the client was thrilled! I was able to make sure no time was wasted on adding unnecessary features, and since we were working on a fixed bid price, we saved my company time and money. My manager and everybody on my team felt great because the project went so smoothly