

Strengths based interviewing

Some employers have decided to adopt a new style of interviewing called strengths based interviewing. The idea behind this relatively new interview style is to identify candidates whose own strengths and preferred working style matches the job role, therefore trying to ensure higher motivation and performance in successful candidates.

The following companies are using the strengths based interview as part of their graduate recruitment at present – Ernst and Young, Aviva, Standard Chartered, Reckitt Benckiser and CB Richard Ellis.

A strengths based interview is an interview that gives candidates an opportunity to talk about their natural strengths and the situations in which these are at their best.

Strengths based interviews seek to find out what you 'love to do', rather than what you 'can do.'

Examples:

- What makes a good day for you?
- Are you a good listener?
- What energises you?
- What activities come naturally to you?
- What gets done on your 'to do' list? What never gets done?
- What things did you really enjoy doing when you were younger?
- When would your friends and family say you are happiest?
- What does success mean to you?
- In your life, what have you done that you are most proud of? What made it significant to you and what did you learn from the experience?
- What are your greatest strengths? When do you use them at their best? Are there situations in which you overuse these strengths?
- Would your friends say you are an organised person?
- Do you keep your promises?

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- If you had 2 hours off work, what would you do with it?
- Do you prefer starting or finishing a task?
- Do you prefer detail or the bigger picture?
- Have you ever done something differently the second time around?
- Do you need to be an expert in something to be a leader?
- What do you do when something at work bores you?
- How do you make others feel confident in your own skills?
- How do you handle working with someone you don't like?
- What makes you more likely to succeed in this role than other applicants?
- What makes you less likely to succeed?

It's more difficult to prepare for this type of interview in advance in the way that you can for competency based interviews. The questions are more personal and interviewers will ask a rapid series of questions that switch focus quickly in order to prevent candidates using prepared answers.

Interviewers are looking for quick and enthusiastic responses as natural strengths will be described most easily and enthusiastically by an individual. Interviewers will look at body language and listen for other signals like voice tone and speed to identify whether someone has pride in what they have been doing or has a specific interest or passion for a subject.

Top tips for strengths based interviews:

- Think about what your strengths are well before the interview date and use the above questions to help you to begin to think about your own strengths as a starting point.
- Have strong examples of when you have used those strengths and how they could be used at the organisation you are applying to.
- Draw on experiences from all aspects of your life – academia, voluntary work, clubs/societies, paid employment, gap year / travel etc.
- Recruiters are not looking for such lengthy answers as for competency questions – But still have examples to hand to back up your claims.
- Answer honestly, otherwise if you pretend to be someone you're not and are successful in securing the position it may not be a good fit for you.
- Allow your natural energy and enthusiasm to permeate your answers.