

Carnegie Mellon – Human Resources

Competency-based Interview Questions

The following is a sample list of questions that correspond with Carnegie Mellon's Key Performance Competencies. Because past behavior is a strong predictor of future behavior, competency-based questions are asked to solicit specific behavioral examples from the applicant's past experiences. Questions should be open-ended to allow the applicant to provide as much detail as possible. Although the university has identified (5) competencies, it is recommended that you add to the list according to the competencies required to effectively perform the available position. If you need further assistance in identifying competencies or writing interview questions you should contact your Human Resources Representative.

Interviewing Tips

- Zero in on what seems significant.
- Keep the candidate focused on actual past events (not hypothetical actions)
- Keep the candidate focused on his/her role (not others – “we”).
- Probe for thoughts or motivations behind actions.
- Keep your responses to a minimum.
- Keep track of time

Customer Service - helping others in support of organizational goals

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate customer.
- Give me an example of the best customer service you have received.
- Give me an example of the worst customer service you have received.
- Tell me about a time when you went beyond what was expected of you to provide quality customer service.

Teamwork - contributing to group performance to meet agreed upon objectives.

- Tell me about a team project in which you participated and your primary role.
- Tell me about a team effort that did not function/work well. How did you handle it?
- What kinds of people do you not enjoy working with? Why?
- What do you like most and least about working as part of a team? Why?

Initiative - taking action to meet work-related objectives without being asked or required to do so.

- Give me an example of an idea that you saw through to completion even though it was met with challenges. What actions did you take?
- Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty in carrying out your responsibilities.
- Give me an example of when you changed or modified procedures in order to carry out your responsibilities more effectively.
- Tell me about something you suggested that allowed others to carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

Leadership - proactively engaging in making the organization a success by working effectively to accomplish objectives in own position and by building consensus on common goals.

- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking leadership role
- Give an example where you saved money or made work easier or safer in a job.
- Tell me about a time when you wanted to convince someone to do something.
- Tell me about a time when you've worked on a project that required you to develop a positive working relationship with someone.

Communication - speaking effectively in individual or group situations; listening actively; writing clearly and convincingly; taking responsibility for facilitating information exchange among subordinates, peers and managers.

- Describe the toughest communication situation that you have had to deal with. What happened? What did you learn?
- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation you have completed? What was significant about this project? How were others involved in assisting you with this project?
- Give an example when you were able to effectively communicate with another person even when that individual may not have liked you. Describe how you handled the situation. What was the outcome?
- Give an example when you were able to effectively communicate with another person even though the individual was from another culture. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

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Interview Evaluation

Use the acronym **W.H.O.**

What was the situation/task?

- Applicant should describe a situation or task he/she encountered

How was it handled?

- Applicant should give specifics about how they handled the situation or carried out the task

Outcome of the situation/task?

- Applicant's action should demonstrate successful completion of situation/task and demonstration of competency sought

Example:

Key Competency: Customer Service

Question: Tell me about a time you encountered an irate customer.

Answer:

W: Once I had a parent on the phone who was pretty steamed about receiving a second invoice for his child's tuition that had already been paid.

H: First, I just listened to let him vent his anger. I asked for his child's name and SSN (in order to verify payment on-line while he was talking) Then I apologized on behalf on the school that he received a second invoice. I then explained the invoicing process and our billing cycle and that his payment and the invoice may have crossed in the mail. I asked him to disregard the second notice and then asked if there was anything else I could do for him or his son.

O: He had calmed down by then, thanked me for explaining the process but said that he hoped this would not happen again.