

Feature article

Yeung at heart

What do interviewers look for during interviews? – Part II



By Dr. Rob Yeung

Imagine you're sitting in a job interview and the interviewer asks you: "Do you have good communication skills?"

How would you respond?

Let me tell you how two candidates might respond. Firstly, a weak candidate might say: "Yes, I have good communication skills."

Now, that's not a *wrong* answer, but let's now examine the second of our two hypothetical candidates. A strong candidate might say: "Yes, I have good communication skills. For example, there was an occasion a few months ago when..." and then go on to give a *specific example* of when he or she demonstrated communication skills.

Becoming a memorable interview candidate is about giving examples to back up your assertions about yourself. Think about it: Anyone can *say* that they are great communicators, team players, problem solvers, and so on. But by providing a concrete example of *how* you have communicated, *how* you made a major contribution to a team, or *how* you solved a problem creatively – that's how you make interviewers want to hire you.

In my [previous article](#) published in the April issue of AAT Express, I listed seven key skills or competencies that most employers look for. Hopefully none of those skills should be a surprise as they cover essential proficiencies ranging from being able to communicate with colleagues to possessing drive and initiative.

The CAR method

So how do you go about constructing your examples? The acronym CAR will help you to prepare short but impactful stories to share with interviewers:

- **Challenge.** Begin by giving in only one or two sentences a little context about the situation, problem or opportunity you faced. For instance, you might say, "About six months ago, my boss told us that the department's budget was being cut by 15 per cent. So I knew that I would have to think creatively in



order to get the project done properly.” Or: “A client once rang the office and complained that her shipment hadn’t arrived. She was really angry and I decided that I needed to sort out the issue for her.” Many candidates make the fatal mistake of giving too much context, too much background. But employers don’t really need to hear how the situation arose, so try to set the scene in only a handful of sentences at most.

- **Actions.** Your next step is to talk in the first person singular about the actions you took to sort the challenge out. You can do that by using phrases such as “I decided...” “I spoke to...” “I analyzed...” and so on. Some candidates fall into the trap of talking about the team by saying “we decided...” or “we analyzed...” but you have to remember that your entire team is not being considered for the job. *You* as an individual are being considered for a role, not the team. So speak in the first person singular.
- **Results.** Finally, finish your story by talking about the results you achieved. Of course, pick examples to talk about that ended well. So you completed the project on deadline and to budget. You satisfied the client’s needs. You helped the team to achieve more than it had ever achieved before. And so on.

Roughly speaking, aim to spend about 80 per cent of your time speaking about the actions you took. That may seem like a lot. But bear in mind that it’s only by talking about the actions that you, as an individual, took that will help to convince an employer that you’re the right person for the job.

Applying your CAR stories

All you need to do is think about your work experience and come up with a CAR story for each of the seven key skills. The good news is that you can then use your CAR stories to answer many of the questions that interviewers might ask. Imagine an interviewer asks you: “What would you say your strengths are?” You can answer by saying that you’re good at whichever of the key skills you wish to emphasize, and then choosing to give one or two examples to demonstrate how you have used those skills in the past.

Or if an interviewer asks you: “What would you say your major achievements are?” you can discuss some of the results you have achieved (i.e. the final part of your CAR story – “R” for results) and then fill in the rest of the CAR by talking about the challenge and the action you took to get your results. In fact, once you have a CAR story for each of the major skills, you can glide through most of the questions that interviewers may ask you.

Dr Rob Yeung is a psychologist and executive coach at leadership consulting firm Talentspace and author of bestselling career and management books including The Extra One Per Cent: How small changes make exceptional people (Macmillan) and Personality: How to unleash your hidden strengths (Prentice Hall Life). You can follow his news at www.twitter.com/robyeung