

INDIRECT QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself:

Typical Response

I will be graduating from the Business program at Brock this year. As you can see from my resume I have worked as a referee for my local minor hockey association and I have also worked at Tim Horton's, mostly in the drive through window. I have played sports my entire life, and I am also involved with BFIG on campus. My hometown is Simcoe, but I enjoy living in St. Catharines.

Optimal Response

*Academic
Background*

As you know, I am currently enrolled in the Business Administration program at Brock University, and I am looking for full time employment, as I will graduate this spring. I am enjoying my program, especially my information systems course because it has helped to develop my Access and Excel skills.

*Extra-
Curricular
& Other
Work*

While at school I have become involved with an on-campus student association, the Brock Finance and Investment Group (BFIG). As a sector manager I have been able to make several presentations to our membership, recommending promising stocks. As of last week, my suggestions for purchase have increased by 20%. Outside of school I have worked as a hockey referee and at Tim Horton's on the drive through window. Both opportunities have helped me to recognize some of my strengths. As a referee, I had the chance to develop strong teamwork skills and also helped my decision making skills since all decisions had to be made quickly and they had to be based on a solid understanding of the rules and regulations. My job at Tim Horton's also helped to develop my communications skills and conflict resolution. During the last four years here at Brock I have been involved in intramural sports; I find this outlet helps with the balancing of academics and extracurricular.

*Summarize
About You*

I am the type of person who is very passionate about projects that I take on; I give 100% effort in my work and believe in working on something until completion. I have displayed this throughout my academic career by achieving high marks and continually setting goals for improvement. In my work experience I have been consistently recognized as an employee who goes above and beyond the job description and in my extracurricular activities, I have always been the person to stand up and take on a leadership role.

Suggestions:

- (1) Review the job description that has been posted
- (2) Do a Google search for similar job descriptions
- (3) Be sure to mention your extracurricular involvement
- (4) Remember it is most important to sum yourself up at the end, and try to describe who you are and what you could bring to the job/organization
- (5) The answer to this question should be different each time; it should be tailored to the position. Think about the impression you want to leave.

What is your greatest strength?

Typical Response

I have strong communication skills. I have developed this skill and it has helped me to successfully complete my courses. My major average is good.

Optimal Response

State the Skill

The one strength that would best match the position is my communication skills.

Academics

This skill has been instrumental in my success with my program at Brock, where most of my classes involve some aspect of group work. This has enabled me to continually develop my communication skills by taking on an active role in my groups. I find the group is more productive and has a better end product when I strive to listen to what group members have to say in order to really understand their ideas. I often find that I am the group member who is saying “this is what I think you mean, is this correct” and making sure that I understand what everyone is really saying.

Work

My background in customer service has also contributed to building my communication skills. Working for a major food chain provided me with exposure to a diverse population. I found that a number of customers faced barriers to communication. Each successful experience has helped to provide me with a sound background for successful communication. In addition, I took advantage of all tutorials and web-based sessions that my company provided.

Suggestions:

- (1) Research the position and understand what the employer is looking for
- (2) You do not have to limit yourself to just one; look at the job description and talk about 2 or 3, use strengths that best fit the job
- (3) provide some concrete examples

Tell me about your greatest weakness:

Typical Response

My weakness would be public speaking. I get very nervous in front of groups, and I find it difficult to present my information in a relaxed manner. In university you have no choice so I keep doing it. With each experience I think I am getting better.

Optimal Response

State the Weakness

I sometimes have difficulty with group presentations. During my first year, I would dread the public speaking component of my classes, but I learned very quickly that this would be a major component of many of my university courses.

Highlight the Positives

When I have group work to do with class mates I have no problem presenting ideas and concepts and defending my point, but once we get in front of the entire class I sometimes experience some stress and anxiety. Now that I have completed my 4th year, I am feeling more comfortable and confident in my presentation abilities.

How Did You Address the Weakness?

I know the key for me is preparation; I need to know my PowerPoint completely and I need to practice a number of times. I also find it helps if I try to anticipate some of the questions that might come up at the conclusion of a presentation. I make sure that I have my notes printed out and in front of me; I even highlight key words to help me if I were to lose my train of thought. My last group presentation was to over 60 people. I was still pretty nervous but the evaluation sheets we collected at the end of the presentation were positive and I felt good about it in the end. My next goal is a presentation to 100 individuals.

Suggestions:

- (1) Do not describe a weakness that may be important to completing the job
- (2) When considering “weaknesses”, don’t think of it as the worst-case scenario. Rather, focus on skills that do not come naturally to you; something that you have to work at in order to do successfully. It can even be a skill that has improved over time.
- (3) It is not enough to say what the weakness is, you need to convey to the interviewer what you are doing to address or improve the weakness
- (4) Show your desire for self improvement - you want the interviewer to understand that you are not the type of person to be stopped by a weakness
- (5) When you are talking about the weakness try to soften the language you use to describe it; use the words “sometimes” or “occasionally”.
For example: “*sometimes I experience stress*” or “*occasionally I experience some anxiety at the thought of a public presentation*”

Why do you want to work here?

Typical Response

I have always been interested in the work that the United Way does, in fact I have volunteered at some of the agencies that are sponsored through the United Way. The position looks interesting and I think it will be a good experience to highlight on my resume.

Optimal Response

The Organization When I saw the job description I knew that this would be a great opportunity for me. I am well aware of the importance that United Way plays in the St. Catharines community and I know that you exceeded your \$3 million goal with your last campaign.

The Industry During my second year at university, I chose to volunteer at Women's Place, which is one of the agencies sponsored by the United Way. I worked within the department responsible for finding affordable housing for women making the transition from the shelter to an independent living arrangement. In my final year I worked on developing an Excel spreadsheet that documented all real estate possibilities within the community, updating the data each month. The experience was very rewarding for me, as I got to help people in the community.

The Job In addition to my interest in working for United Way, the job description seemed to match a great deal of the skills that I have developed through my academics, work experience and extracurricular involvement. Within my Business Administration program, I have had the opportunity to develop my communication skills, both written and verbal. In an academic setting I practice and strengthen my verbal skills daily, as much of my grade is dependent on participation in class and delivering presentations within groups. In my extracurricular involvement with the Brock Business Ambassadors, I promoted Brock business to parents and prospective students, and also have made a number of group presentations to high schools students. As for my written communication skills, I have consistently scored over 80% in my management classes, where 60% of the mark is based on written case studies. Another area that I saw as a real match was the computer background that you were looking for. One of the courses I took in my first year was an Information Technology course. By taking this class I was able to really build on my existing knowledge of Excel and Access, and I successfully completed the class with a 80%. In addition to my database and spreadsheet experience I have taken courses in desktop publishing and I have worked extensively with Adobe Photoshop in developing newsletters with digital photography for keeping in touch with friends.

What You Can Gain I feel that this role would allow me the opportunity to improve my public relations skills and to enhance my knowledge of different media publications.

Suggestions:

- (1) Consider three elements here: the job, the company, and the industry.
- (2) Your fit with the industry and company - this is when you talk about what you have discovered through your research.
- (3) Your fit with the job - presenting the employer with all the ways you match the position
- (4) Make sure you include what you hope to gain out of the position, as well as what value you will be able to add to the position and the company
- (5) Talk about the competencies that they are looking for and how you have developed them

Hypothetical/Situational Questions

A customer approaches you and asks a question for which you do not know the answer. What do you do?

Typical Response

I apologize, tell the customer that I do not know the answer to the question, and advise him or her to come back later when the Manager is available. When the Manager returns, I ask for the correct response and note this information for future reference.

Optimal Response

Be Authentic

I apologize for not knowing the answer immediately and then attempt at finding out the correct answer by reviewing policies & procedures.

Provide Details

If I am still unable to find the information, I ask the customer for their name and phone number, let them know that I will find the proper information and follow up with a phone call. When the Manager returns, I ask for the information, contact the customer and ask if there is anything else he or she requires. I thank them for their patience and, if appropriate, offer an incentive for continuing to maintain a relationship with our company.

Prior Experiences

I did have this experience on one occasion while working at a retail store. In that situation, I demonstrated my problem-solving skills by addressing the customer's inquiry about a special product order by recording the request, contacting a colleague at another location and advising the customer that her order may be possible. After my supervisor returned to the store, I confirmed the request and followed up with the customer before the end of business hours with a favourable response.

Suggestions

- Understand the skills that are being addressed in the question being asked, and make sure to clearly identify the skill you will address in your answer
- Provide as much detail as possible; provide a step-by-step approach to your answer, including questions you would ask and resources you would use

BEHAVIOURAL BASED QUESTIONS - Optimal Response

Give me an example of when you used effective time management and organizational skills to complete a task within a set deadline:

Situation

Two summers ago, I worked as a landscaper for a small landscaping company. In this role, I was responsible for maintaining several public properties, including parks and office buildings, as well as private residences. At the beginning of each day, I was provided with a schedule that outlined the locations I needed to visit and the work that needed to be done at each.

Task

I demonstrated my organizational and time management skills by planning how much time could be spent at each job in order to complete all of the assigned locations each day, and determining the order in which I visited each site.

Action

To give myself enough time to plan out my day, I would arrive to my shift 30 minutes early, which gave me enough time to see the schedule of jobs and plan out my route and timeline.

I first considered the location of each job and mapped out the most time efficient route. I then looked at the amount of work that was required at each location and estimated the time I could allot at each place. I used this estimation as my guideline to stay on track with my schedule. Finally, once I completed the assigned work at each site, I logged the time it took to complete, which allowed me to compare my original estimated timelines with actual timelines. This allowed me to track my progress throughout the day, and also enabled me to make any necessary changes or adjustments to my original timeline to help me when planning for the next day.

Result

As a result of my strong time management skills and my ability to organize my time and responsibilities, I was able to consistently stay within my timelines in order to complete my work, and over the course of the summer, I improved my level of efficiency by 15%.

Tell me about a time when you had to sell a product or service:

Situation

When I was working as a Sales Associate at Future Shop, there was a situation where a customer came in to price out our personal computers. While he indicated that he had just been to see one of our competitors and was likely going to buy from them, he wanted to do some comparison shopping to see what we could offer.

Task

I saw this as an opportunity to promote our products and special promotions in order to persuade this customer into changing his mind about purchasing with our competitor.

Action

Before showing him several products, I began by asking a few simple questions about what he would be using the computer for. For example, I asked whether he was upgrading his current home computer or simply adding another one to his household, and if he would be using it for mostly business or personal purposes. I also probed to see if there were any special features or programs he was interested in having. After spending several minutes listening to his needs and some of the challenges he had experienced with his previous computer, I asked some follow-up questions and communicated my understanding of his specific needs to ensure I made relevant product recommendations.

I showed him three different computers, all different brands with similar capabilities and several add-on features such as programs and additional software tools. In my explanation of each brand, I clearly identified and explained how each feature addressed the needs he had already identified to me. While he acknowledged that the products I showed him would suit his immediate needs, he did address some concerns about program updating options and technical support. As it turned out, the last computer he purchased had certain limitations and ended up costing a lot of money to upgrade certain programs. In addition to this, he had to wait several weeks to correct a technical problem that occurred only months after the initial purchase, and the company he purchased from charged him for the cost of the new part. I addressed these concerns with some information on our extended warranty programs, and technical support and service centers. I also highlighted our service guarantee program which ensures that a customer's computer problem will be corrected and returned within 7 days. I also explained that the brands I had showed him offered several software upgrades that could be installed quickly and easily either on-site or from home, and that there was no installation costs for on-site services.

As I wrapped up my conversation with this customer, I indicated that if he was interested in purchasing that day, he could take advantage of a special promotion being offered where he could receive a 10% discount and add an accessory of his choice for free.

Result

As a result of me taking the necessary time to understand the customer's needs and address his concerns in a knowledgeable and honest way, he ended up purchasing one of the three brands I showed him instead of purchasing from our competitor.

Tell me about a time when you demonstrated strong leadership skills in either an academic, work, or extracurricular setting.

Situation

While completing my third year of study at Brock, I took on the role of President for a club in the Faculty of Business called the Brock Marketing Association (BMA). In this role, I was responsible for overseeing all aspects of daily operations through my executive; implementing new ideas, and ensuring that the mission of this association and the needs of our members were consistently met.

Task

My biggest task in this position was to use my leadership skills in order to motivate my team, maintain a high level of enthusiasm and drive throughout the year, and ensure that we were all working towards the same objective.

Action

In the months leading up to the academic year, I held regular meetings with my executive in order to effectively plan for the year by getting input from each executive. I took the lead by communicating the BMA vision and asking each member of my executive to identify the specific goals they saw for the association for the upcoming year, and we spent our first meeting collaborating on the direction we wanted to take. We spent our subsequent meetings generating ideas around events and membership recruitment strategies, and I encouraged participation from all executive members and incorporated many of their ideas. It was important to me that each individual contributed to the strategic plan for that year in order to involve them in the process and provide them with a sense of ownership in the association.

From the ideas we generated, I was able to assign specific projects to each executive based on their interest in the area, as well as their individual skills and the learning opportunities. In order to maintain a high level of enthusiasm, even during stressful times, I implemented a recognition program for the executive and any volunteers we had helping us with projects. This program allowed me to track the work that each individual contributed and areas where they excelled, and provided them with a formal letter acknowledging their contributions toward an event/project. I also made myself available in order to offer individual guidance and support throughout the year. It was important for me ensure that we all remained focused on our initial goals, even as the year progressed. With this in mind, I held monthly meetings with the executive, which allowed us to revisit our goals and make any necessary changes to events and projects along the way.

Result

By coordinating regular meetings, involving my executive in much of the decision making and idea generation process, and keeping motivation high, our club was successful in recruiting 50 new members that year, in addition to increasing our event participation by 20% from the previous year, and receiving the award for “Club of the Year”, which was voted on by our peers and professors.