

Transcript | STAR Storytelling for UK Civil Service Applications

Victoria Pallois 0:16

Well, hello everybody. Welcome. I'll just give a couple of seconds until everybody goes through. But welcome. You are in the right place to learn everything about Star Storytelling in the UK Civil Service applications. My name is Victoria and I'm an event producer here at Apolitical.

It'd be great to hear from you all. So please, while everybody is joining, please do share in the chat where you're joining from and which organization you work for. Myself and my team are all in London today. It's a very windy day, hopefully. Well, thankfully we're not outside.

So today we'll be exploring how public servants can use STAR technique to tell their career stories more clearly and confidently in UK civil service applications and interviews. We'll hear practical tips on what makes a STAR example stand out, how to shape examples for different career Stages and how to show the value of your experience with greater impact. For those of you who are joining for the first time, welcome to this Apolitical event. I can see so many chat introductions. That's amazing. Please continue. What is Apolitical? We are the world's largest online network of public services.

With a mission to make government smarter. It is used by half a million public servants and policy makers across 170 countries, providing governments with the tools and networks they need to become more effective and tech enabled organizations.

Apolitical is a strategic partner to governments helping them prepare their workforces for the future. We achieve this by upskilling the workforce through short online courses focused on government priorities, enabling them to find and share back best practice through peer communities.

And by building innovative tools designed for and with governments, I am loving the introductions here. So I obviously can't scroll through this amazing chat, but we have so many people from Newcastle, Glasgow, Nottingham, London, somebody who's just a guy, Plymouth, Defra, DWP.

Liverpool also also very windy in Liverpool. I think it's just everywhere. We are thrilled to extend an invitation to join all your peers from across the UK and the world in the career development community. Whether you're new to the public sector or further along down your career, this forum is a space to share resources, ask questions.

And learn from peers around the informal rules and everyday realities of career development. My colleague is just about to share this link in the chat, so please do click on it before it disappears in this very crowded chat, but I love it. It's the best.

I'll get a few technical notes out of the way. The event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are available in the Apolitical homepage put up. Closed captions are available and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings.

So before we introduce our speakers, we are going to run a few quick polls to get a sense check of where you're coming from today. The first poll is what's your biggest challenge with the STAR technique? So.

If the poll doesn't show up on your screen, please do share a little emoji react, but otherwise I'll just read it out like. So the question is, what's your biggest challenge with the STAR technique? You have multiple options knowing what counts as a good example.

Sticking to the structure without rambling, matching my story to the competency, making results sound measurable, or I've never used star before. We have a lot of emoji react, so I'm guessing there's a lot of people who cannot see the poll.

So it will be posted in the chat very, very shortly by my colleague. So please just or share in the chat your biggest challenge with the star technique. You have multiple options.

OK, well, obviously it's a bit difficult for me to comment on results because if you cannot see this poll, you cannot vote. But I can see a lot of a lot of answers around scores on different campaigns. A lot of answers have been about knowing what counts as.

That's a good example. I think that's a great, that's a great answer. I also struggle with that. And then making your results sound measurable. Yes, that's the toughest part of STAR and hopefully we'll solve all these kind of trickiness today in this session.

OK, so we have a second poll that we will share in the chat. So this poll question is how do you write your star examples for for applications? So my colleague is about to share this question in the chat with the.

The options. So the options are I rely on memory when the time comes. I use my LinkedIn or my CV as a reference.

I ask colleagues or mentors for applications or inspirations. Sorry. I look at examples online to guide me or I've never written a star example before.

So we have a lot of answers coming. There's a clear winner of I rely on memory on when the time comes. I guess that's the easiest way. We have a lot in the chat of one and four. So that would be I rely on memory and I look at examples online to guide me. That's very interesting. Looking online to guide me. That's amazing. Well, thank you so much for bearing with us with these polls and for replying in the chat. It's super interesting, great insights. And now I'm introducing you to our speakers. We are very fortunate here today to have two brilliant speakers, Adam and Jessica.

So Adam Towers is Principal Transport Strategy Officer at Tameside Council, responsible for shaping and delivering the transport pipeline policies and partnerships that will drive sustainable growth across the borough. He is passionate about total place transformation and tackling spatial inequality.

Qualities through better connectivity and integrated transport. Adam brings experience from working with local authorities across the Northwest and was a contestant in the Local Government Association's 2024 LG Challenge.

Welcome, Adam. Lots of emoji reacts for you. Thank you all for joining these emoji reacts and welcome to now Jessica McEvoy. Jessica is the Director of Delivery at Apolitical. Jess has worked across government consultancy and civic technology in the UK and internationally, including in senior roles in the UK.

Government, such as Deputy Director at the Government Digital Service, where she led major national platforms such as Identity, Gov.uk, Notify and Pay. Jess has also worked extensively with governments at multilateral organizations such as.

World Bank, UN and the OECD. Welcome, Jess. It's fantastic to have you both today. So before we launch into today's presentations, I thought we could start with a quick icebreaker to just get us warmed up. It's an amazing icebreaker, Adam and Jess.

If your career so far had a title, what would it be? So I'll give you a moment to think and to everybody else in the chat, I am expecting many answers, so please be creative. But Jess, I'll cut to you first for this one.

Jess McEvoy 8:22

Um, I started out as a policy person and then got really hands on with technical delivery. So I think I'd say from policy to platforms.

Victoria Pallois 8:35

That's great. Thank you. And Adam.

Adam Towers 8:39

I'm going to be quite self-critical and I'm going to go with the one word of of bungling, which I think comes across as a as a bit of a pejorative. But I think actually bungling is something really good to do in your career. I think one of the great things about the public sector is that it provides you with space to make mistakes, to try things that are that are new and and may not necessarily go according.

To plan, obviously a lot of project managers in the room and as I'm sure you'll all appreciate very often despite the the cool exterior, you're bungling your way through a through a project and a large part of what we do from from risk management to to financial planning is you know not necessarily about not bungling but making sure that when we do.

Bungle we we land on our on our feet.

Victoria Pallois 9:23

That's a great answer. Thank you so much, Adam. Well, I could see so many amazing answers too in the chat. One, one of them is up and down and up again. Or we have all about the knowledge or IT guy with no qualifications. That's interesting.

That's really amazing or stalled. Well, I hope that we are here to help you move from this title and find another one. So without further ado, I'm going to hand over to you, Adam, for the next 15 minutes. Adam, take it away.

Adam Towers 9:52

Thank you very much, Victoria. Great to see everyone in the chat. I hope you don't mind as there's not going to be any slides. I think it'd be good for us to have a bit of a conversation. I'm really sort of looking here in the in the chat squiggly career.

I think that is a mumbler in muddler in chief. A lot of this really resonates with with me and with my career, particularly when I was earlier on in in in my career in the public sector. When I started working for local authorities, I I was in Kirklees council.

For a number of years before moving over to Wigan Council and I found myself getting quite frustrated, quite nervous, quite concerned that despite doing a great breadth of work from from 9:00 to 5:00, I couldn't quite work out how that could slot in to interview preparation. For roles much more senior than my own, I was permanently worried and sort of flustered really that my nine to five was relatively junior. The stuff that I was learning and doing whilst valuable and interesting was very difficult to frame in a way that would make me.

An attractive candidate for a principal officer position. I found the star technique to be particularly helpful and took part in a number of sort of training programs quite similar to this training session here today and I find as somebody who tends to be a bit scatter gun in their thinking that having those.

There's very clear star principles helps to really sort of regiment my thinking and personally I've found it to be really helpful to take any job specification bullet point by bullet point, turn them into questions, get pen to paper, scribble down, star and really work.

Through that example, just to prove how helpful I find that in preparation for what I'm about to speak to you now, I've been scribbling desperately on my notepad, so I want to set the scene. It's just over a year ago and I'm on the same floor as the building I'm in now. Tameside Council interviewing for the Principal Transport Officer role at the time. That was quite a big jump for me in my career and those were exactly the nerves and worries that were going through my head. How to take practical project management experience that I had at Wigan Council, frame it into star techniques and then deliver that in a way.

That was engaging and relevant to the role. So I want to give you 2 examples of that and I hope these sort of resonate with some of the nine to five challenges that you've had in your careers and hopefully demonstrate that quite fun, zany and.

Pretty messy examples of things going wrong can nevertheless be fashioned into really effective at star stories. So the first story I want to tell you about is 1 from my time in Leigh. Leigh, for those who aren't au fait with Greater Manchester is a post industrial ex mining town.

Just.

West of Manchester and Lee's a really important part of our growth story in Greater Manchester. Great deal of investment going into Lee from levelling up monies to pride in place investment to the Mayor's Challenge Fund, which I was principally responsible for when an officer at the authority, the Mayor's Challenge Fund.

At the time was used for delivering active travel interventions and these interventions were being delivered around 2023/2024. So I'm sure you may be able to recall there was a great deal of national political discourse around a war on motorists around 15 minute cities.

And such forth. Anyway, the actual style technique. The situation was pretty straightforward. As an officer, I would attend quarterly forums with voluntary community sector partners, with fellow officers and with members of the public. The situation very straightforward to communicate in a way that.

It was really clear and engage the public in our shared growth journey. Straightforward situation. The task was to make sure things didn't go off without a bump, which proved to be a little challenging. Typically these events had something between 25 to 30 attendees.

And we did everything through Eventbrite, so well in advance you'd be quite aware as to who was coming, who was going. You have emails, names, so on and so forth. So imagine my

surprise when I turned up on the day and noted that there were 405055 people who'd signed up to the event. Fantastic, I thought as.

Enter.

Into the conference room, all of a sudden a merry band of attendees made their way in with what could only be described as Yellow Pages in their hands. Huge wedges of documents, annotated, signed, and so was a as an officer, right?

Ask as to where these people had come from, what they were up to. And I was given very cagey answers that it wasn't my business, that they were here on private business, that they had found out through alternative media that there was a public event taking place. So I took to the stage and to.

Fulfil the the task, the the scenario to deliver, engage, communicate and all of a sudden 5 to 10 people stood up and started shouting about 5G towers, COVID lockdowns, 15 minute cities and a war on motorists. I very quickly understood.

That there was a large group of of a conspiracy theory group that had made its way to the meeting. So a really bad example of something going off the rails, but a brilliant example of how you can turn a very stressful example of crisis management into a.

Our story, because my tasks were extremely easy to delineate. It was to stop, take a breath, think calmly, mitigate any risk, make sure that any potential reputational damage to the authority was mitigated.

A critical task to communicate not only my values but our shared values as an organisation, and probably the most important task of all, to make sure that in a very tense situation that the attendees ultimately were were safe and that everybody managed to to get home without some sort of fracas. So in terms of actions.

Alluded to a couple of them just now. I stopped, took a breath. Now I think that's not very typical in in staff stories, but I think it's a really good example to to use in interviews because so many actions take place simply through communication.

I stood firm rather than fidgeting or holding my hands in my pocket. Made sure that I was open, visibly looked like I was on top of things. I like the the phrase think in ink, which is a very good concrete.

Communication skill. I took out a notepad and rather than answering questions ad hoc, made sure to write down every response that I heard, not just to have a record on paper, but to slow down the flow of the conversation. I took a mental note of the potential risks that could happen as a consequence of the.

Event and almost rag rated them in my head. I talked about some of those risks earlier, principally the risk to members of staff and reputational damage to ourselves as an organization. And then in terms of the the core actions, I made sure that individual by individual.

I listened, reacted. I spoke in a way that I hope was clear and confident, respectful, and critically, I also laid out by way of good housekeeping our values, our principles, and drew a firm line at abuse.

Directed towards council officers. So in terms of results, not necessarily something showy or exciting. The result was that the event overran by I think something like 90 minutes. The result was that many members of staff felt pretty flustered and stressed.

But I think in that situation, in that interview room, when I spoke about the results, I think even though it's not quantifiable, it's nevertheless measurable. Nobody was hurt, which sounds ridiculous, but very important in conflict management and crisis management.

And critically, I think I communicated the vision and the values of the organisation that I worked for, and I did so in a way that was genuinely respectful. So I think a really great example there of a nine to five challenge that nevertheless delivers a communication story.

It's quite long-winded. Of course you can stick in loads of extra tasks and actions if you feel like you've got enough time in your interview. But I think also there's an element of fun and a genuine element of storytelling. I think it's really valuable and really helpful to not just rattle through how you prepared an Excel sheet, but really to.

To invest some of your personal character and some of your personal values stories into your star examples. Let's give you a second example, if I may, before the end of my time, which is a little bit more project management in flavour.

So at the time the scenario, I think I mentioned earlier the Mayor's challenge from this big pot of money that was being used by authorities in Greater Manchester to deliver active travel infrastructure schemes. So I was managing a pot of just over 1,000,000 lbs and the purpose of the scheme was to deliver an active travel route essentially.

Resurfacing A bridleway. It's not the most exciting piece of infrastructure to deliver. You know, certainly wasn't working on HS2 or ripping up the roads, simply resurfacing A bridleway. Now, as part of the project, I became au fait with all sorts of regulatory.

And legislative affairs that touched on public bridle ways and I understood a public path creation agreement and a public path creation order sounds rather dry, but at the time it took up an enormous part of my working week. Essentially we had a little stretch.

Of public rights of way, then a stretch of private land and then another stretch of public rights of way. And we wanted to connect the two. So one of my tasks was to manage that project and manage the legal agreement that would put in place at the legal assurance so that contractors could get onto that private land, resurface this.

Track and build this piece of infrastructure straightforward. Well, unfortunately not. As I'm sure many of you will appreciate dealing with solicitors and going through public bodies and procurement can be very difficult and in practice programs are very hard to run. So the task very straightforward.

To deliver the scheme to do so on time and under budget was frustrated by these legal challenges and these programmatic challenges. Unfortunately, in terms of actions, I'd actually foreseen this at project inception.

And basic project management skills that you'll be using in your nine to five can nevertheless be expanded on in star examples. So I foresaw a potential legal challenge with this patch of private land and simply added it as a risk in a risk log. I made sure that I accurately and honestly reported that.

The likelihood of that risk taking place, the impact that risk would have on the programme. It's very pessimistic about my own abilities to manage that challenge and as a result put in a really large contingency part within the cost plan.

Now in terms of results, I think sometimes there's an expectation that in your star stories, every result should be a glowing sign that you're the slickest operative in the public sector. I think it

couldn't be farther from the truth because the results from the projects were absolutely disastrous, the programme.

Didn't work. The solicitors didn't get back in touch. We ended up in a situation. Can you believe it? Where contractors were on site delivering the resurfacing on the bridleway, resurfacing on the other part of the bridleway, and there was no legal agreement in place for the bit in the middle.

So eventually a fateful day arrived where the contractors had done all of their resurfacing and didn't have anything left to do. So I'm sure you can logically imagine we we we ended up in a situation where the contractors were being paid 2500 lbs a day to sit in their vans.

Essentially twiddled their thumbs with no legal agreement in place. We couldn't get them onto the private land. We couldn't get the thing resurfaced. Huge critical error in the in the project.

Now fortunately, as I talked about before, I'd done my risk management, I'd done my my flagging, my necessary escalations to certain.

Legal officers within the authority and critically, because I'd foreseen the situation taking place, I'd put in some contingency within the budget. Now thanks to that contingency, thanks to that project management, thanks to escalating at an appropriate time, which I wouldn't have been able to do had I not done basic risk management ultimately.

After 10 days, we were able to get the project back on track. The contractors were able to finish the job and whilst we certainly spent a lot of that contingency, the program was ultimately delivered on time and the project was ultimately delivered at budget.

So again, a really good example there, I think, where things that go wrong off the rails get muddled in your nine to five can nevertheless present a really engaging star story that actually is probably more believable than trying to frame everything you do in your.

To five as a perfect, flawless project. Things go wrong. That's absolutely fine. The more things go wrong, the more examples you get. And it's really valuable to use star as a as a means of of of talking through. So I hope that was helpful. I'll take a look in the chat afterwards.

But yeah, really appreciate your your thoughts and I'll be active in the chat as we as we plot on. Thank you so much for for listening.

Victoria Pallois 24:49

Thank you, Adam. I want to see as many emojis as possible as a virtual round of applause for Adam. I can see them coming. Amazing. Well, I think these were great examples to show how like kind of messy daily tasks can have an amazing storytelling. And I think that Miles kind of summarized it really well in the chat.

He said I thought that star techniques had to be more rigid and boom, boom, boom. And it's I thought it was really well explained and great examples. Before I hand over to you, Jess, I can see that we've had already so many questions, but I want to encourage everybody to submit your questions.

You should have at the top of your screen a Q&A tab where it's just easier for us to keep and monitor your questions. So if you do have this tab, please submit it in the tab. If not, please submit it in the chat and my team here will try their best to monitor the chat and see everything. So Jess, over to you now.

Jess McEvoy 25:50

Thanks, Victoria. I'm just going to bring up some slides.
So is that all working?

Victoria Pallois 26:01
Perfect.

Jess McEvoy 26:01

OK, great. Hi, everyone. Thanks very much for joining us. So my name is Jess McAvoy. I am Director of Delivery at Apolitical. Before this, I spent lots and lots of years working inside the government.

Starting in a more junior role and moving to Deputy Director at Government Digital Service, I recognise quite a lot of names in the chat, so that's very exciting to see folks. I worked a lot across government, so it's nice to see everyone there.

I think over the course of my career in public sector, you know, I've applied for lots and lots of roles myself. But also one of the fun things about being in DDS is I got to do a lot of recruitment across government. So I would see tons and tons and tons.

Of other people's applications and and and do lots and lots of interviews at all different levels, but especially at a lot of the senior levels all the way up to non-exec directors for various departments. So the things that I'm going to talk about today are the things that I think.

Kind of some sort of tips and tools that I think kind of help you refine your technique and kind of have more success. Because I think the one thing that I would see come up over and over again is that people are doing amazing work, really strong work. It's a highly competitive environment though, so when it comes to the applications.

In the interviews, folks often like really struggle to translate that into translate your experience into like really clear examples. So if I kind of do a different angle to.

Adam, to to kind of talk about some practical methods you could try and employ for that. So in particular I'll I'll kind of briefly touch on a bit more about what I think a a strong star example is. And how you turn your everyday work into those stories. Some really common mistakes that I've seen lots of times over success factor based or or competency based applications and and some lessons about how you can kind of prepare for the more senior roles because there's a bit of a shift that happens and.

It's helpful to kind of understand that in advance. I think it's really horrible that a lot of the times in the process, it's mid process that you realise there's something unexpected coming. So why does star matter? I think the processes in in the civil service are are kind of designed to assess the evidence.

Of behaviors or success profiles or competencies. And they they're kind of trying to standardize people who are, you know, not standard, right. So that's why they use this because I've thought it myself in interviews is like, why do I have to frame things in this way? But it's it's so that they can kind of score things basically in the room.

So the panels really, they don't want to try and guess whether someone seems promising or capable. They're looking for like really clear evidence that you've demonstrated certain behaviours in a real situation. So the star structure is used really widely because of that, because it helps you organise your examples around 4 basic elements, which is your situation.

Your task or responsibility in that situation, the actions that you took, the result. And I think I've seen some folks sort of suggesting in chat too that sometimes there's a bit after that which is around a lesson or reflection, which I 100% agree with. That is where the follow-up questions will come.

In the interview is they'll say, you know, if you if you do give an example of something that was like challenging and difficult and didn't turn up brilliantly, which I think is a really good idea to do because it shows you can handle those problems. They're still going to ask you then. So what did you learn? What would you do differently next time? You know, there's a So what factor that you have to kind of think.

It up.

And I think some folks kind of talked about what is it in the room that kind of really makes it a strong star example. And I think one thing I've learned is that the strength of a star example isn't necessarily solely about the structure, it's about clarity.

And ownership. So the strong examples really usually contain 4 things, a clear situation with just enough context for the panel to understand what was happening or why it was a challenge and 2nd your specific responsibility in that situation and 3rd and I think this is the most important bit. It's the the actual specific actions you personally took and finally the result or the outcome. So a useful test for this because I think we've all had the feedback where someone will say, oh you you keep saying we instead of I and I think like that's too bland and generic. What what's actually helpful here is if you can replace.

Yourself I with the team, then your example is not specific enough. It needs to go an extra level of detail in order to be like appropriate for the star example. If if we works, you haven't gone into enough detail, so panels need to understand what you personally did in that situation.

So just to make that a bit more concrete, it's helpful to compare like a weaker example with a stronger example. So a weaker example might say something like a team improved the service and stakeholders were happy with the outcome. Obviously I'm paraphrasing a bit, but you know it's it's high level and it's generic.

The challenge is that we don't really know what was the issue, what the person actually did, or what changed as a result. So a stronger example might be when our digital service failed accessibility testing, I led a two-week redesign Sprint with designers and engineers.

We prioritise the most critical accessibility issues and introduced automated testing. As a result, service pass compliance checks and user complaints drop significantly. And then if someone said, well, what did you learn about that? You know, you could sort of say, well, we introduced automated testing, but next time I would also introduce this other thing, you know, like just some.

Sort of detail that you've you've kind of picked up and the example shows like a really clear challenge, very specific actions and a measurable outcome and that is what they're looking for. It's that level of detail. So you know, I think have a think about about your projects and your experience. I'm going to touch on some preparation you can do in a second.

I think, you know, turning these everyday work, your everyday work into stories, I think I often hear from folks that they feel that they don't really have the right kind of examples. Adam touched on this before. You know, folks assume that they need a really huge transformation program or a major reform project, but actually.

You know, I agree. Many strong star examples come from fairly everyday work, for example, resolving a really difficult stakeholder issue, improving a process that wasn't working well, delivering something that has really tight deadlines, or fixing a problem that's been stuck for a long time. I love to meet people who fix things that have been stuck for a long time.

But that's those are the people who remove sludge out of systems. It's it's a a brilliant thing to be able to brag about. And those situations often demonstrate the behaviours that the panels are really interested in. So they're looking for things like judgment, calibration.

Collaboration as well and delivery and and capacity to reflect and learn like lots of folks said earlier, you know that that kind of.

You know, if it didn't go well, like, what would you do differently? What have you learned from that? I think it's really important to think about this from the perspective of the panel. How can you make it as easy as possible for them to say yes to you? All right, That's all they want to do. So, you know, reflect on whether or not the thing that you're thinking about is coherent and simple and and and.

Is going to make sense to someone who hasn't been in your world. So this is something that I wanted to kind of touch on. So I personally do this. I've done it for years and I've introduced it as a concept, a voluntary concept for people who report to me, you know?

Because I've just found it so useful, I actually heard about it in a session just like this. Someone recommended it and I started doing the exact same thing. So what I do is I maintain what I think of as a star matrix and this is designed to tackle the problem that lots of people said in in the the kind of initial.

Poll, which is, you know, being able to do your your your kind of perfect best example on the fly with little kind of preparation. You know, this shouldn't be a memory test. Interviews are not memory tests, right? So. So why not do the preparation in it ahead of time, right? Like we're not, we're not.

Trying to hire someone who's able to kind of hold a large bit of data about their former work history in their head without ever looking at a piece of paper. That's a ridiculous way to hire people. So down the first column, imagine this is a spreadsheet. I'll show you an example in a SEC.

But in the first column, I basically start listing and maintain it over time. Significant projects, significant initiatives, entire roles, people I've worked with like difficult problems. There's a column right emerging and along the top.

I so and that lists that first column could be projects, programs, any substantial pieces of work and I add to it year on year. And then across the top I list the different competencies or behaviours or success factors depending on the thing that I'm applying for, but they're usually quite overlapping. The word changes whether it's competency or success profile.

But usually they're, you know, testing similar things like leadership competencies and things like that. So then in each of the boxes, this I have to admit AI generated this box for me and I would not have a tick in those boxes. What I put is I create short star examples where those intersect. So for one project it might.

Demonstrate leadership or stakeholder management and delivery, and another might be a strong example of problem solving and strategic thinking. And I have the star phrasing in the box, and I think the value of this is really twofold. The process of filling it in forces you ahead of time to translate your work into a star format.

Which is exactly what you need when preparing for applications and interviews. Don't do it on the fly. And the 2nd is that it becomes a kind of like personal evidence bank. So when a role comes up, you're not starting from scratch. What have I actually done in my life? You've got this big spreadsheet that has a big long list of things that you've already refined.

And and adapted over time. And let me just linger on it for a second. I put a big block on this one because it's not actually my star matrix. It's for someone who was working for me that they asked me to add some things to, which I do and I'm happy to do and I think you know.

Don't be shy about asking for people to help you with these things, but this is the spreadsheet format. So you can see in column A there's like things that are being worked on or that you've done and successfully achieved like down in the column and across the top.

There's a kind of competent competency listed and then this is the star set in different boxes.

My personal one has the competencies listed out along horizontally and then the star format is written into one box because I I'm all killer, no filler. I like to like to have brief star examples rather than.

Kind of light, um at light and degree of detail, but um, I just thought I'd kind of show you a specific example so you can kind of get a visual for what I'm talking about because the ticks in the box doesn't really help you understand it.

And so I think beyond kind of the preparation and the the sort of the work that you do ahead of time, I think some other common mistakes that kind of come up is spending too much time on context.

So a lot of people kind of spend half of their answer explaining the organization or the background to a project. Panels just usually need to know only enough context to understand the situation. It's really important not to burn all your time on explaining why you know the challenge is a challenge.

They believe you, you know, they believe that it was a challenge. So just give them just enough headlines to describe what type of challenge it was. I think the 2nd is relying too heavily on me rather than I. And I know we've touched on this already and I know folks have heard it as feedback in in in chat.

And it's a deeply frustrating bit of feedback to get and and I just strongly encourage you to go back to the point I made earlier, which is if someone says to you, you said we instead of I like the So what to that is it needs to be more specific, right? If we works in that sentence.

It wasn't detailed enough in terms of what you specifically did, what you lifted, what you hands on fingerprints on created. So go to the next level. You know, if you've had that feedback before, teamwork's obviously really important, but panels still need to understand what your individual contribution is because that's.

What they're hiring is, you know, what are you gonna turn the dial on for them?

And the third is not clearly explaining the result or the impact. And even if the outcome was learning from something that didn't work perfectly, it's still it's important to explain what changed as a result. It's almost more important. If something was a catastrophe, then that lesson, that reflection at the end is really helpful because you can say, yeah, it was.

Really bad. And as a result, we did this next time. So it wouldn't happen again. I mean, that's a lovely way to finish a catastrophe story. I think just kind of touching on the mid-level and senior like versus senior roles. I think, you know, I'm sure there's some people on the call who are like quite keen to kind of like go for some of those.

More senior positions as well, and I would say that as you move into those more senior roles, the expectations for examples shift slightly. So the panel may deliberately apply a bit more pressure and challenge to the questions they ask for mid-level roles.

The examples are often things like delivering work effectively, solving problems, managing stakeholders, improving services. But at the more senior levels, they're looking for examples that show you things like strategic decision making, leading teams and organisations, managing complexity.

And influencing across boundaries. So the question shifts slightly from can you do the work and can you evidence that you can do the work to something more like can you lead others and shape outcomes? You know, are you the person that can help us deliver through others and the team?

And that's what you kind of want to re lens your examples a little bit.

I think some lessons about moving into those senior roles is one thing that's worth saying if you if you think you're you're kind of like ready to want to move into some of those senior roles is that the job itself can change quite significantly. There's a phrase.

Like called post practitioner. So if you're a really hot shot designer or a really hot shot writer and you decide you want to be queen or king of all the designers or writers, you're probably not going to do much designing or writing. You're going to be leading other people who are going to do that work. So you really.

To think to like for yourself, do you like the idea of leading through others or do you really wish that you got to stay still have your hands on all of that work? Because not everybody like promotion is not the like the only metric of success, right? So I think really think seriously about whether those senior roles or even what you want to be.

Do it with your time, like working through others versus having your hands on the the kind of pressure point of the work.

So at mid-level roles, you're often assessed on what you personally deliver. But at senior roles, the focus kind of shifts. You're often no longer just responsible for delivering things yourself. You're responsible for creating the conditions of delivery for others. So it could be setting strategy, aligning different teams around a shared goal, influencing stakeholders across departments.

And another difference is the situations you're dealing with tend to become more complex and ambiguous, and senior roles often have really competing priorities and incomplete information and difficult trade-offs. So when you're preparing examples for more senior roles, it's often really helpful to think about situations where you navigated the complexity or uncertainty or whether Tolan.

The challenge wasn't just solving a problem, but it was about making a judgment about the best way forward. And strong senior examples also tend to show leadership rather than just expertise. They show how you built or LED a team, how you created clarity in a complex situation, or how you helped others succeed.

And increasingly, senior roles often involve working across organizational structures and boundaries, across departments, across professions, across sectors. So examples that show your ability to collaborate beyond your immediate team can be really, really powerful when you want to go for those more senior roles.

Victoria Pallois 43:18

Jess, sorry, I'm just giving you a one minute time check because we have many, many questions and I'm sure many of them want answers.

Jess McEvoy 43:19

A very quick.

Yeah, no worries. I'm on my last. I think I'm on my last one as well. But I was going to just also forewarn you that at those senior roles, a lot of people can be quite surprised by the fact that the process can broaden slightly. So as well as those interviews, there's often a psychological or a leadership.

Assessment. There could be a scenario exercise, a personality based interview, and these are designed to explore like your leadership style, your judgment, and how you approach complex or ambiguous situations. And the good news is that preparation helps here as well, thinking clearly about your experiences and your decision making and how you lead others.

Is going to help you with those processes as well, but it's really awful if you're not expecting them. So it's really important to understand that the higher up to the chain you go, the more likely you're going to be exposed to that kind of thing. And I think, you know, just touching again on the three practical tips is, you know, build your examples before you need them.

Ensure that you practice those examples out loud before the interview and and then third, really focus on, you know, clarity more than complexity. The panels aren't looking for the most impressive story, they're looking for the clearest evidence that you can do the role.

And so, yeah, just in closing, I think you know in the mid-level roles, your examples need to show that you can solve problems at the senior level roles. I would say your examples need to need to show that you can shape systems and the the key to strong applications is being able to tell those stories really clearly. Thanks.

Victoria Pallois 45:01

Thank you so much, Jess. I love the idea of the spreadsheet summarizing all the tasks you've done. It's quite brave, I want to say, because you you are kind of faced with reality. You can't escape it. I'm seeing already so many emojis reacts. Amazing round of applause for Jess and Adam.

We have so many questions, but before we do so, I wanted to let you know that we've curated a great full on resource for you today. This is a teaser session from one of our popular courses demonstrated how to use STAR in context when crafting your job applications.

So to receive the link to the session, you can simply click on the link that my colleague is posting in the chat. Click on it before it gets lost in this chat, or go in the career development community and find my post at the top of the page and we'll e-mail you the resource later this week.

Responding to another comment from Alexander, for any questions that we have not time to answer, this is where you can create in the community, ask your questions, help each other. You know this is what they're here for.

So let's go to questions. I know you're all like kind of dying to have any answers. The first most popular question is from Miller Bethan. Sorry, Adam, I'm going to go to you for this question is for personal statements, do you suggest using many stars for each essential?

Criteria.

Adam Towers 46:33

That's a really good question. Thanks. Is that question from from Bethan?

Victoria Pallois 46:38

Yes.

Adam Towers 46:40

Personally, I'd I'd avoid using mini stars in personal statements and I'd I'd say in a personal statement really the operative word is personal. You know, while while stars do give really good structure to to personal statements, it's it's an opportunity there for you to to express your authentic self. So I'd suggest.

Rigidly sticking to mini star examples, at least for personal statements, can possibly be a bit too rigid and and potentially stop you from expressing not just your experience, but your your character as well.

Victoria Pallois 47:15

Thank you, Adam. The next question, Jess, I'm going to go to you. We've had also many, many up votes on this is for any neurodivergent colleagues. They are asking how to balance, especially I'm guessing in interviews when you are put on the spot.

How can you balance the rigidity of the format, so star and the creativity of using your example? Do you have any tips on balancing this?

Jess McEvoy 47:42

Yeah, I do. So you know, and it's not an exhaustive list, but I would say a couple of things. One is I almost hesitate to go go here, but I think in preparation mode is a really good time to use a I to kind of.

To kind of help you develop out your star matrix. And I'm not saying have it just produce all of the content in there, but ask it, you know, sort of say your unfiltered version out loud. You don't even have to type into a chat bot and just say I really need this to be crisp. You know you're you're a world expert level like career.

Victoria Pallois 48:11

Uh.

Jess McEvoy 48:19

Coach, I need my kind of work that I did on this project to be a really crisp, precise, clean star based format example and I tell you it will take 3 seconds.

Victoria Pallois 48:34

That's a great answer. Thank you, Jess. I'm actually going to stay with you, Jess, for the next question. We've had a number of of votes also on how far back can you go and choose an

example? Can you do you need to have recent examples or can they be from previous roles or even?

From like the private sector.

Jess McEvoy 48:54

Yeah, I think I personally, you know, sort of go. The whole point of making the matrix for me is to be able to pull the most accurate and correct thing in the situation. I think it's a bit like if you're cooking something and you keep apologising for the meal.

That you produced not being perfect. Don't do that in an interview. Don't. Don't say, oh, I'm sorry, it's not very recent. Like, just be clean and answer your question that you were asked, you know?

Victoria Pallois 49:26

Thank you, Adam. I'm going to go to you next. I had selected a question and I lost it in the thread of the the Q&A chat, but this is, this is great because it means that we have so many questions to go through. Yes, Adam, I had a question for you from Rachel. My last feedback said.

I should have focused more on the how and why, but I find this hard to apply and align with the STAR technique. Do you have any tips?

Jess McEvoy 49:54

OK.

8.

Adam Towers 49:56

Thanks, Victoria. Yeah, it's a good question, Rachel. I really resonate with some of the advice that that Jess just gave there around almost journaling, workshopping outside of the the interview process. I think the value in that is that outside of the the sort of mental.

Strain of of cramming everything in before the 15th of March or whenever your interview is, it almost helps you to think in star. I think from from my experience the the worst feeling is when you've got plenty of experience that you want to get across, you could really answer.

The how you could really answer the why, but rather than giving yourself the opportunity to think, you're desperately trying to shoehorn in specific words and framings. You're trying to remember what the S stands for, what the A stands for can be really difficult, and there's only so much mental bandwidth that you've got to play with, so I'd suggest.

Really listening to Jess's advice there and just journal workshop. Do some star examples in your free time, even if you're not looking to to interview in the in the near future. The big advantage of that is that you can start to think in star and as soon as you start thinking in star.

You release all of that mental bandwidth so you can really tackle the the how, the why, or tackle the the curveball question that you weren't expecting.

Victoria Pallois 51:24

Thank you, Adam. If we think back on the first poll that we had of when, how do you come up with your star examples and the majority of you said you relied on memory. Well, next time we do this event, I want all the answers to be I rely on my star matrix.

OK, well, I have another question for you, Jess. You mentioned in your presentation that the candidates need to think about the like, So what? So you know, what would you do differently next time? And Rebecca actually asked, how can you prepare for this type of question?

Jess McEvoy 52:00

I think in exactly the same way that you're doing the star format. So if you're prepping answers in advance about what you did, you know, like don't make the first time you think and reflect on what you would do differently in the interview, you know, just add an extra column or add an extra line, however you're writing something and just sort.

To say, you know, if I was going to do something differently, what what really bothered me about that? And then just work out a nice, crisp, short, precise way of of sort of saying that. I think one thing I would say is that, you know.

You've got to anticipate what the person in the room is actually wanting to hear. And that means, you know, you need to kind of make the the learning that you have both be true, but also resonate with the hiring people and and so you know.

Just make sure you calibrate so that you're actually addressing some sort of challenge that is in the role that you're actually applying for.

Victoria Pallois 53:01

Great. Thank you, Jess. Adam, I'm going to go to you and actually tie two questions in one. During your presentation, we you a lot of our attendees mentioned in the chat that you are a great storyteller. So Stephanie asked.

What is a process to have such a clear narrative and story? And that's my first question. And the second, which is a bit tied, is how do you make the difference between the S situation and the T task?

Adam Towers 53:34

Yeah, thanks. Thanks for that, Victoria. That's a really good question around storytelling. I appreciate it's a it's a pretty shoddy answer, but but practice makes perfect. I find public speaking really difficult. I have done for a very long time.

I've got extremely clammy hands and as I showed earlier, my notepad is is full of scribbles and notes. I certainly do find it challenging. I think one of the one of the best bits of advice I would give would be to to throw yourself as public speaking opportunities at any and every opportunity at work.

So speaking personally, when when I started my role, I was fortunate enough to have a young employee network at Kirklees Council, which was the first local authority that I works at, presented me with loads of opportunities outside of my nine to five to get in front of people to speak was was nerve-racking.

Flushed in the in the face, but it was remarkably good experience and hopefully it helped me to be 1/2 decent public speaker. So really practice does make perfect and and don't be afraid to to

get yourself out there. My second question was around the difference between scenario and tasks and I think.

That does tie in quite neatly to that piece around storytelling. If you were to tell a story or a fable or a fairy tale, you wouldn't immediately jump into the part where the knight jumps onto the horse and races off. You'd have to set the scene 1st and talk about the.

The landscape and the weather and and the characters. So I think if we're talking about storytelling and we're talking about star, yes, the situation is is very much your opportunity to to set the context, to put the characters in a row. Remember that the interview panel probably has absolutely no idea what you were doing.

At the time. So that context is particularly valuable. And then when you transition over to your T over to your task, that's an opportunity to start really laying the groundwork in terms of those actual verbs. You know, what were you about to do? What particular things did you need to achieve? Quite similar really, I find to the difference between outputs.

And and outcomes and it's quite a a helpful difference to really sort of pin down in your in your mind before you go into the interview.

Victoria Pallois 55:58

Great. Thank you, Adam, and I hope that today was a great experience for your public speaking opportunities. We have time for one last question, so I'm going to go to you, Jess, for a very short answer. Is there a preference for more short answers or one example dissected at length, especially for?

Personal statements.

Jess McEvoy 56:20

Yeah, I I I personally always trend across examples. So I I try to show that I've got like range and depth, you know, in writing and in speaking. So there's always the opportunity for them to ask you a quick follow up if they want a bit more information about something, especially in the interview obviously.

On the writing bit, but yeah, I always try to kind of spread. Now that's a luxury. If you don't, if you're quite early in your career and you've worked in one place, then I would kind of do like diverge under that one role, split out all of those things that you've been doing as different examples.

Victoria Pallois 56:58

OK. Well, thank you so much. We have to stop the questions here. I know we haven't answered all the questions, but that's all the time we have. So please give me as many emoji reactions as you can possibly send for Jess and Adam today. Thank you so much and thank you most importantly to you attending.

Jess McEvoy 56:59

It.

Victoria Pallois 57:18

Who are coming today and investing all this time in your learning. So we hope that we start this event today and the team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today. We are aware that some of you might not see the poll, so please, if you are happy about it, just press.

And as many emoji reactions as possible. So while you are responding to this poll, I wanted to share a few more events that are happening in the near future. And Please remember to sign up to these events regardless of if you can join or not, as we'll send you the recording shortly after. So on Tuesday we will have how to lead neuro-inclusive teams in public service, which will explore everyday habits for inclusive leadership. So for all these very upvoted questions about neurodivergent people, please join us on Tuesday.

Then on Thursday, we'll have AI ethics and safety and explore what responsible, safe AI use in government looks like. And next month we'll have we are kicking off our new series called Career Moves and we are starting with how to get your first senior role. So this was just.

An introduction and next month we'll continue on this topic. Thank you so much for joining today. We hope that you find the session really useful. You will find all these links in the chat. You will keep an eye out for the e-mail coming your way with the e-mail. Sorry, I said that.

The link, the recording, the resources, find my post in the community and we hope to see you very soon at another apolitical event. Have a great day. Bye bye.