



ayanna e jackson

Career & Leadership Development

# How to Create Compelling Career Stories

Presented by: Ayanna E. Jackson - AEJ Consulting LLC





# How to Create Compelling Career Stories



Being able to articulate your **accomplishments** and your **ability to handle challenges** is important for your interview success. Having a format to structure your responses makes it easier to create compelling career stories to:

- Demonstrate your **capability** to tackle tough or different types of situations. (Past performance can be a strong indicator of future success.)
- **Quantify your impact** in your current role. (This is especially important for performance reviews and raise requests.)
- Highlight your **qualifications** for the position you're pursuing.

The STAR formula helps you create STAR stories that can be used:

- In an interview (especially when answering behavioral/situational questions)
- On a **résumé and/or LinkedIn profile** to highlight **accomplishments**
- In a performance review or to justify a request for a raise

In a job interview, use STAR stories when you're asked questions such as:

- **"Tell me about a time when you..."**
- **"Can you describe a situation when..."**
- **"What do you do when..."**
- **"Have you ever..."**
- **"Can you give me an example of..."**
- **"Describe a time when..."**
- **"Share an example of when..."**

There are four components to the STAR formula:

(S) – Situation

(T) – Task

(A) – Action

(R) – Result

You can also add an optional section at the end of your STAR story: Reflection. What were the lessons learned from the situation? If the result was failure, you can talk about what you learned from the experience or changed as a result.

**Practicing these answers in advance will ensure you actually answer the question and don't start to ramble or get into minute details during the interview. Stay focused on the accomplishment and answering the actual question.**



Use the worksheet to create 3-5 STAR stories using the following prompts (or come up with your own). Preparing specific examples ahead of time will help you be more confident in your responses. Write out the answers and practice them by recording yourself on your mobile device, with a friend or your career coach. Practice your STAR stories until they sound natural, not rehearsed. Review your stories prior to your interview(s).

### Here are some prompts you can use to create your STAR stories

*("Describe a time when you..."):*

- Set a goal
- Showed initiative
- Went above and beyond the call of duty
- Took on a new challenge
- Collaborated with others
- Worked under pressure
- Persuaded someone
- Finished a challenging project
- Had a conflict with a co-worker or employee
- Dealt with an unhappy customer
- Experienced failure
- Demonstrated your time management skills
- Had to motivate others
- Prioritized certain tasks
- Made a difficult or unpopular decision
- Disagreed with a manager
- Made a decision with incomplete information
- Survived a stressful situation



Here's an example of a STAR formula used to create a STAR story.

**STAR STORY:** Collaborated With Others & Had a Conflict With an Employee

**SITUATION:**

In my role as manager at GATE Corporation, I added three new team members when we acquired LoneStar Productions. My team of five had all worked together for more than two years at this point, so integrating new staff was a big deal – both for me and the team. Unfortunately, the new employees were used to different processes and methods for project management, which led to problems on the first project we worked on after the acquisition.

**TASK:**

As the direct supervisor of the team, it was my job to make sure that the onboarding of the new team members went smoothly. Both my existing team members and my new team members recognized right away that there was a problem, and they looked to me for a solution.

**ACTION:**

The first thing I did was sit down with the new team members to get a better understanding of how they were used to tackling projects. I also shared with them the standard operating processes that our team used for project management. Next, I organized a team-building challenge that had nothing to do with the current project – a way for the whole team to get to know each other, without the pressure of the project that was hanging over our heads.

**RESULT:**

As a result of the team-building challenge, the employees got to know each other better. The specific team-building exercise focused on communication styles, which had been at the root of the project problems. As the team members interacted more, they were able to communicate more effectively to address some of the differences in project management processes. We ended up blending some of our existing methods with ideas from the new team members, which made the whole process more effective. Even though we had gotten off to a rough start, I ended up bringing the project in on time and on budget, and that team of eight has now been together for the past year.

**REFLECTION:**

I always knew the importance of bringing diverse project management workstyles together, but this situation reinforced that. Now, whenever we bring in someone from the “outside” to work on a project, we sit down and make sure we’re on the same page before we dive in.



**Exercise:** Choose a prompt from the list and fill in information for each part of the STAR formula. Then, write a STAR story based on the information. Repeat the process until you have 3-5 STAR stories to draw from.

**STAR STORY #1** \_\_\_\_\_

**SITUATION**

What was the problem? Who was involved? When did it happen? Where was this (which job/company)? Provide context and relevant details – being brief, concise, and specific.

**TASK**

What was your role? Which part of the situation were you responsible for? What was your specific area of responsibility?



**ACTION**

What action(s) did you take to address the issue? What tools, processes, and systems did you use? What key decisions did you make?

**RESULT**

Quantify the outcome with concrete data – ##, \$\$, and/or %.

**REFLECTION** *(optional)*

What were the lessons learned? Did you make any changes as a result?