

# Assessments and Competency Based Interviews

A Candidate's Guide

What to Expect from Sesame Bankhall Group

## Recruitment Methods

SBG uses a variety of recruitment methods when selecting the right person for a particular role. This allows us to assess a broad range of skills in a variety of situations; helping us to place the right people in the right roles.

The exact methods we use will vary depending upon the specific requirements of each vacancy. Your interview invite will let you know which of the following assessments may be used on the day:

**Competency Based Interview** – Please see page 3 for guidelines to competency-based interviews at SBG.

### Role Play Scenarios

In a role play exercise you'll be asked to simulate a real-life working incident, this could be over the telephone or in a face to face scenario. The main thing is to be aware of the 'background' to the role play, but never make up your mind in advance about what's going to happen.

- Keep cool
- Make sure you understand the situation and ask questions before launching in
- Get an overview of the issues first
- Be prepared to argue your case calmly
- Expect the unexpected
- They may try to put you in a stressful/confrontational situation to see how you react in difficult situations. Avoid being aggressive, even if they are

### Case Studies, In Tray Exercises and Written Tests

Case studies and in-tray exercises are used to test your ability to review written material and draw out the important points. Case studies might require you to sift through large amounts of data (written reports, memos, phone messages, statistics etc.), understand the issues and come up with proposals or recommendations. In-tray exercises simulate several day-to-day tasks and require you to prioritise them usually with an explanation to the order you've provided. Written tests may be assessing technical ability for the role, the most important advice for completing written tests is:

- Take your time to read each question carefully
- Be aware of the time limits and spread your time appropriately between the answers
- Don't panic if you don't know the answer, move on to the next question

### Presentations

You may have been provided with a brief before the day to prepare a presentation or could be asked to produce a short-presentation on the day. If you have to deliver a presentation, here are a few ground rules to calm your nerves:

- The best presentations have a solid structure. This is helpful both as a safety net to you as the presenter if you lose your train of thought, and also to the audience who like to know where they are and what is to come
- Don't try to include too much. Remember what it feels like to listen to a speaker – too much information and you begin to switch off

- Get both the verbal and non-verbal messages across. Avoid mumbling or talking too fast, look at the audience, don't pace up and down and use your hands naturally
- Practice giving presentations before the real thing, in front of other people or a mirror
- Prepare for questions; try to anticipate what they will ask you and prepare some answers
- If you make a mistake, forget it instantly. As long as you don't dwell on it your audience probably won't even notice
- If you require any equipment on the day (such as flipchart or a projector) please let us know in advance of the interview

## Competency Based Interviews

Competency based interviews use questions which aim to find out how you have used specific skills in your previous experience and how you approach problems, tasks or challenges. All our interviews are competency-based. We do appreciate that the prospect of any interview can cause individuals to worry, and make you think about:

- What will they ask me?
- Who will be interviewing me?
- What if I don't know any of the answers?
- What if I feel I don't do my best?
- What is a competency anyway?

We are going to try to allay some of your fears by explaining a few features of competency-based interviewing and giving you some 'hints and tips' on how to prepare yourself.

### What is a Competency?

A competency is simply a description of the behaviours you display when performing a role effectively. Different sets of behaviours are put together for different aspects of someone's role and this is how an overall competency framework is made up.

*Let's explain with an example:*

If your role involved being able to organise your work effectively, the competency for this might look like: *Organisational Skills*

*Plans and organises own and delegated workload to ensure deadlines are met. Adapts plans when departmental priorities change.*

That's a short example but it'll give you the idea.

### What is a Competency Based Interview?

The aim of a competency-based interview is pretty much the same as any interview, that is, to give you the chance to tell the interviewer as much about your past work performance as possible. What will probably feel different about the competency-based interview is it uses a very structured approach.

The interviewer (or interviewers, there will probably be two) will have a set of questions to ask you that have been prepared in advance. They will read these questions to you from their page almost like a script – the reason for this is that they will be asking exactly the same questions of each candidate applying for the role, to ensure fairness and consistency.

The interviewer will have chosen to ask you about the competencies that most closely link to the role, this means they may not question you on every one of the competencies in our framework. They may also tell you as each question starts, which competency they are questioning you on.

### **How do I prepare for the questions?**

In answering the questions, you need to provide the interviewers with examples or stories of situations you have faced in your previous roles that demonstrate how you have performed. So, for example, if you are asked:

*Interviewer: Tell me about a time when you had to answer the phone to an angry customer.*

*You: You will need to tell them of a time when this happened. You could start by telling them the background to the situation – what was happening, why, who else was involved etc. then go on to explain exactly what you did and how you went about handling the situation.*

*Bear in mind, they will want to hear specifically what you did. If others were involved you can mention that but remember to give a clear picture of the part you actually played in the example.*

*It's important to remember to tell them what the outcome was. If the outcome wasn't quite what you had hoped for this is still useful information for the interviewer but let them know what you learned from the situation.*

The interviewer is expecting to hear a description of the Situation, Task, Action and Result, an example of which we have included below:

*Interviewer: Tell me about a time when you had to answer the phone to an angry customer.*

*You:*

#### **Situation**

*I was working within my current role and customer called me, she was unhappy and raised her voice at me. Her bank statement was showing a charge that should not have been applied to her bank account for the sum of £20.*

#### **Task**

*My job is a Customer Service Adviser and I deal with these sorts of issues every day; my role is to speak with customers and sort out their issues.*

#### **Action**

*I calmed the customer down by listening to her problem and letting her vent her frustration, I then empathised with her and looked into her account. I realised that she had been incorrectly charged, I told her that I would remove the charge from her account with immediate effect and apologised sincerely.*

#### **Result**

*She ended up apologising to me and said thank you very much for sorting out the problem, she went away a happy customer.*

You will need to prepare enough examples for each competency. There is likely to be more than one question per competency so bear that in mind. Some of your examples may overlap more than one competency. That's to be expected and the interviewers will make use of all the information you provide against all of the competencies.

### **What will the Competencies be?**

SBG has a behavioural framework, which all roles are measured against. These are the behaviours that we require from our staff in order to drive our company values; Engaged, Professional, Innovative and Collaborative. Your competency interview will be based on a number of these behaviours that are translated into competency questions.

The competencies are:

- Technical Competence
- Organising & Executing
- Managing & Developing Self & Others
- Service Delivery Excellence
- Entrepreneurial & Commercial Thinking
- Embracing Change
- Leadership
- Collaborative Working
- Interacting & Engaging

In every job description you will see each role is marked against these behaviours with different levels from A to D. These correspond to the behaviour that we would require from individuals working in that particular role. Please see Appendix 1 for a brief description of the behaviours required at each level.

### **Where do I get all my examples from?**

There are many areas you should consider when gathering examples including:

- Projects you've been involved in, whether work or education based
- Challenges or problems you've faced
- Relationships with customers, managers, peers and/or colleagues
- Times you've influenced a decision
- Negotiations and deals you may have been involved in
- Successes you've had surrounding work completed

Once you sit down and start to think about it you'll find that you have many situations that examples can come from. Ideally your examples should be from your last two or three years work experience but you can go further back if you need to.

### **What about my technical knowledge?**

Technical questions will be covered under the competency for Technical Competence, there may be some additional technical questions added to some of the competency-based questions.

Interviewers, in this situation, will be asking questions designed to check what level of technical knowledge you have and how you have applied it in the past. They may equally introduce some form of testing following the interview, for example, case studies or presentations.

## Once I've prepared my examples, how can I prepare myself?

You may still be feeling nervous. In reality, we can't take all your nerves away but we will give you as many hints and tips as possible about preparing yourself beforehand and during the interview.

### Mentally and physically preparing beforehand

To make yourself feel better in the lead up to the day of the interview you could:

- Rehearse your examples in your mind
- Find a friend or colleague to rehearse with (this one's handy because they can give you some valuable and constructive feedback)
- Remember you have good examples to describe
- Visualise yourself being successful
- The interviewers are there to help you give off your best – they are not aiming to trip you up or trick you
- The day before, try to relax by keeping to your usual routines
- Exercise is good for relieving stress so this may help you
- Try to get a good night's sleep the night before

### During the interview itself

What you need to do:

- Pace yourself with slow, even breathing
- Answer in a clear, logical manner that the interviewers can easily follow
- Pause for thought when you need to, the interviewers won't think badly of that
- Keep a clear focus on the competency being discussed
- Keep your language specific, positive and above all sound interested!
- Make sure you get across specifically what you as an individual did

You may feel that you want to take notes in with you to help you remember your stories/examples. There is no problem with doing this but keep them brief. The recommended approach would be to use prompt notes or cards with minimal wording. Bear in mind that constant reference to notes spoils the flow of the interview and can look less professional. If you do choose to use notes, don't read directly from them.

### What will the interviewers be doing?

- The interviewers will have been trained on how to help you through this process, helping you to describe yourself and your skills
- They will be trying to obtain as much information as possible
- They will be working from their script of questions so don't be put off if they sound less spontaneous than other interviewers you've met
- If they feel they've gathered sufficient evidence against one competency they may well say "thanks but we'll move on now..." or words to that effect so don't be offended at this
- They will start with open questions to help get you started and then may probe for details to find out more information
- Remember they will want to help you as much as they can

It's over to you now. The key to a successful interview will be the preparation you put in beforehand. Rehearse if you can, in your mind or with someone else and remember that everyone involved in the process will be there to help you give off your best.

**Good Luck!**

## Appendix 1 – SBG Values & Competency Framework

SESAME BANKHALL GROUP.

# Our Values

## Community.

We create a collaborative environment that's welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

## Expertise.

We empower advisers with quality tools, knowledge and support.

## Passion.

We go above and beyond to drive industry excellence.

### Competency Framework

The below provides an overview of the internal skills, knowledge and behaviours we require from our employees to drive our values.

Competency	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
<b>Developing Self &amp; Others</b>	Seeks to keep up to date with knowledge, skills and role-specific procedures required for own job. Drives own development.	Identifies and prioritises development needs and knowledge gaps, provides appropriate coaching, support, guidance and training.	Actively seeks opportunities to enhance leadership learning and experiences for self and others.	Fosters a culture of continuous learning and establishes employee engagement.
<b>Leadership</b>	Takes the lead of own workload to meet personal objectives and deadlines, in the support of departmental objectives, prioritising time and activities appropriately.	Empowers people in their role, encourages team members to voice their opinions.	Nurtures others, has a genuine presence and authentic relationships that generates buy-in and enthusiasm.	Provides leadership, creative vision and strategic direction, whilst creating a culture for success by empowering the team.
<b>Technical Competence</b>	Possesses the technical and business knowledge necessary to perform role, shares own expertise.	Is an acknowledged source of expertise, is able to perform more complex tasks, displays accountability for risk management.	Leads the function with fitting working practices, processes and service standards. Possesses a breadth of professional or technical knowledge.	Leads the business to ensure the technical competence of its people, acting to deliver good outcomes for Customers.
<b>Service Excellence</b>	Responds to key internal and external stakeholders in a timely and accurate manner, takes ownership of issues.	Promotes a culture of 6* service delivery with the Consumer Duty principle at its heart.	Agrees demanding and achievable service standards in line with other departments across the business.	Leads a culture which supports 6* service delivery and decisions that lead to good outcomes for Consumers.

<b>Commercially Focussed</b>	Recognises the day-to-day issues and decisions that are commercially important for the business.	Identifies opportunities for business improvement and makes recommendations for ways to improve SBG's standing in the marketplace.	Is commercially aware of competitor activities. Spots opportunities for development in the marketplace.	Develops commercial awareness throughout the business with the Consumer Duty principle at its heart.
<b>Embracing Change</b>	Considers impact of change and progress on internal and external stakeholders, drives continuous improvement, adapts and responds well to change.	Promotes a focus on process improvement, ensures change brings about positive outcomes, develops solutions, communicates change accordingly.	Looks to the future to make new suggestions of ways of working to bring about business benefits.	Fosters a culture of challenging the way we do things to simplify processes and deliver good outcomes for Customers.
<b>Teamworking</b>	Shows commitment to team goals, is co-operative, positive, helps others, shows empathy and collaborative working style. Really listens to others.	Promotes teamwork and collective responsibility, creates an environment of trust and respect, establishes relationships across teams.	Builds successful teams, enables an environment which is open, supportive and considerate to others.	Promotes a culture which fosters the value of each individual's contribution to the team, enabling team building activities and events.
<b>Communication</b>	Listens and asks questions to fully understand needs, uses tact and diplomacy, is open and approachable. Builds rapport, communicates clearly.	Proactively and sensitively communicates with others, listens to others, takes others needs into account.	Develops communication lines within and across departments to foster openness, trust and effectiveness, a professional and confident presenter who makes a lasting impact.	Promotes a culture which provides feedback as the norm, builds influential networks and strategic relationships.