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COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Managers and directors in retail and wholesale

Management & Leadership framework · Management & leadership level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding **4** Good **3** Acceptable **2** Marginal **1** Poor

1. Thriving in a Performance Environment

Consistently sets high standards and drives performance. Monitors progress, proactively overcoming barriers to success and quickly addressing underperformance

Why this matters for Managers and directors in retail and wholesale: Retail is intensely KPI-driven — like-for-like sales, footfall, conversion, average transaction value, stock turn, shrinkage. The Retail Manager Apprenticeship Standard names 'deliver performance' as a core skill. Performance rhythm is daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal. Position 1 reflects the defining feature of the role.

Describe your biggest achievement in your current role.

- Why do you feel it is such a big achievement/strong performance?
- What did this achievement require from you?
- What were the barriers to success? How did you overcome them?
- Why didn't you give up or take an easier option/path?

Describe a situation where you have had to sustain your energy over period of time to achieve.

- How did you organise yourself (planning, targeting, monitoring)?
- Why was it so important to achieve?
- How did you cope with the time pressures/flagging motivation/barriers?
- How did you monitor progress? What was the quality of the output?

Describe the standards that you use to monitor your work.

- What difficulties do you encounter in maintaining these standards?
- How do you measure your performance against these?
- How do you encourage a sense of standards in others?
- How do you ensure that you keep raising the bar on performance?
- What have you done when things have not been done to your satisfaction?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Gives up easily or fails to proactively find ways to deal with issues/barriers to goals achievement		Proactively overcomes barriers to success/achieving goals

Is not able to clearly articulate standards and success measures they set for themselves/for others		Sets high standards for self and others
Delivers results by taking easier/more obvious paths – may not achieve excellence but delivers performance		Takes the path that will deliver the best results rather than accepting the easier option/mediocre performance
Puts in less effort rather than really pulling out the stops and making (personal) sacrifices to make things happen		Consistently achieves goals. Pulls out all of the stops to make things happen
Fails to sustain energy/struggles to keep self focused and motivated to deliver results		Demonstrates the ability to sustain personal energy and motivation over a period of time to deliver results
Is laid back. May not instil a sense of urgency		Exhibits a sense of urgency to get things done
Fails to instil the energy and commitment to maintain the motivation of others through tough and challenging times		Builds responsibility and commitment from others so they sustain their energy and motivation over time
Is rather ad hoc in approach – No disciplines and checks to drive out performance/increase the chances of success		Plans to succeed – takes a structured approach to planning and monitoring to increase chances of success
Tolerates mediocre performance from self and others		Raises the bar on performance everyday
Fails to deal with underperformance in a timely manner		Quickly addresses underperformance in others
Allows others to get away with unacceptable performance/behaviour		Holds others accountable for performance and behaviour. Provides robust feedback to others on performance
Fails to see/help others appreciate the importance of their work and the contribution that they can make		Speaks with conviction about the purpose of the team's work and the contribution that the team can make

Summary of evidence: ______ **Rating (1–5):** ______

2. Leading the Way for Others

Creates a clear and compelling vision of the future, devolving accountability for delivery to the right level whilst offering appropriate levels of support. Drives performance through regular, honest feedback and by building a climate of openness and trust

> **Why this matters for Managers and directors in retail and wholesale:** Store and area leadership of teams. Retail Manager Standard names 'lead and develop people' as a core skill. The retail manager's team is often diverse, shift-based, and high-turnover. People leadership at scale is sustained reality.

How have you ensured that your team feel equipped to deliver the business plans in your area?

- How do you keep the team focused on the business goals/ensure they understand the link between their work and the wider company goals?
- How do you ensure your team feel empowered but not overloaded?
- How do you keep the vision real so it resonates with the team?

Give me an example of a time when you had to lead a de-motivated team or a team who were less enthusiastic/ committed to the task in hand.

- What did you do to keep spirits up and people focused on objectives?
- How were you sure that you had overcome the difficulties?

- What factors did you consider? What lessons did you learn?

Can you give me an example where, with the power of hindsight, you feel you may have pushed an individual or team too hard?

- What feedback did you receive from the individual/team at the time?
- What was the outcome? What might you have done differently?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to engage others in the "why" or the longer term goal and get buy in and commitment		Communicates a compelling vision/picture of the future to generate motivation/enthusiasm in others
No clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting to track progress to goals		Keeps the team focused on the goals through establishing clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting
Keeps hold of too much themselves (fails to empower the team) and/or micromanages the process		Devolves accountability to the right level and offers appropriate levels of support without micromanaging
Rewards and recognises others in the same way, irrespective of their personal performance/ contribution		Provides differential recognition to others on the basis of objective measures of performance
No evidence of checking that the team see personal relevance of the change/direction and their contribution		Ensures the team understand the need for change/ the direction and that this resonates personally with them
Fails to provide the right balance of support and challenge		Provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge
No evidence of seeking feedback from the team re the suitability/effectiveness of their management/ leadership		Checks with the team to ensure that they are feeling appropriately supported and challenged
Provides only developmental feedback rather than praise and motivation to build confidence		Recognises and rewards good behaviour and performance
Has less flexibility in leadership style (e.g. struggles to take a directive stance or to collaborate/facilitate)		Adapts leadership style to suit the needs of the team and the circumstances
Fails to coach – does the job for others. As such may not get (sustainable) performance improvements from others		Coaches others to help them perform. Raises awareness and generates responsibility for action in others
Creates a command/fear climate where teams are less comfortable expressing their views or trying new things		Builds a climate of trust and openness where people are comfortable expressing their views and trying new things

Summary of evidence: ______ **Rating (1–5):** ______

3. Understanding the Commercial Context

Stays informed of trends and changes in the wider market place in which they operate. Identifies commercial business opportunities and takes action to realise these. Considers the longer-term implications of decisions

> **Why this matters for Managers and directors in retail and wholesale:** Retail Manager Standard knowledge: 'business strategy, commercial planning'. Range, pricing, promotion, competitor awareness are daily concerns. The role is unavoidably commercial — every floor decision has a margin implication.

What do you do to ensure that you have all of the information you require to perform effectively in your role?

- Where do you get the information from? How does this assist you?
- How do you keep up to date with developments in/outside the business?
- Why is it important to do this?
- What do you see as the key challenges/changes in the industry over the next 5 years?

Describe a situation where you have had to balance strategic goals with short/medium term profit?

- How did you go about doing this? What was the outcome?
- Has there been a time where you have focused on a short term win to the detriment of the long term?

Describe a situation where you have spotted and pursued an opportunity you knew could add value to the business.

- How did you spot the opportunity? What value would it add? Why?
- How did you get support for your plans? Who did you engage?
- How did you quantify the return on investment?
- How did your proposal differentiate your business from the competition?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited understanding of the nature of the industry, the market and the competition		Understands the industry, the market and the competition
Fails to keep self up to date with the necessary knowledge to perform in role		Stays abreast of trends/changes in the market place and applies these to their role
Cannot articulate the key challenges/changes facing the business/industry		Demonstrates a sound appreciation of the medium/ long term challenges facing the business
No strong profile/network/reputation in their field or in the industry – has not capitalised on wider networking opportunities		Has built a strong network and profile in the industry – seen as a thought leader
Takes a reactive approach to business issues. Fails to anticipate and take action to prevent these from occurring		Able to spot issues before they arise and presents solutions
Reacts to rather than anticipates and takes action to exceed customer needs and expectations		Able to anticipate and exceed customer expectations
Is overly focused on results at the expense of staff, customer at the expense of commercials etc. – fails to balance all aspects of organisational performance		Considers the impact of their actions on employees, the organisation and its customers/clients
No evidence of spotting new opportunities – ideas are more evolutionary than revolutionary and may not differentiate but rather keep up with the competition		Uses knowledge of the market/industry to spot new business opportunities
Focused on achieving results in the short term rather than longer-term sustainability/profitability		Prepared to sacrifice short term gains for longer term sustainability/profitability
Lacks entrepreneurial spirit/courage to pursue opportunities as a result of the potential cost of failure		Has the courage to pursue commercial opportunities where the potential benefits outweigh the cost of failure.
Narrow focus on improvement. This is limited to within own area, does not consider improvements across business units/areas		Appreciates how all parts of the organisation fit together and ensures activity is aligned
Does not demonstrate an appreciation of costs and profit		Is cost and profit conscious

Summary of evidence: ______ **Rating (1–5):** ______

4. Relating to Others

Adapts style to interact effectively with a diverse range of people. Treats people fairly, showing interest in and respect for their ideas and opinions. Demonstrates concern for the needs of others

> **Why this matters for Managers and directors in retail and wholesale:** Retail Manager Standard names 'supports D&I, positive attitude, team player' as required behaviours. Diverse store teams, customer-facing colleagues, mixed shifts, high-turnover environment all require sustained interpersonal adaptability and concern for individual needs.

Describe the last time you felt real empathy for a colleague.

- Why did you feel such empathy? How did you let it show?
- How did your behaviour towards this individual compare with your behaviour towards others
- What was the impact (positive and negative) of this?

Describe a situation where you wished you had acted differently with someone at work?

- What made you respond as you did?
- What do wish you had done differently? Why?
- How did you know your approach had not hit the mark?
- How have you adjusted you approach in the light of this experience?

Who are some of the key people with whom you need to establish working relationships?

- Tell me about how you adjust/modify your style to meet their needs?
- Who do you find easiest/most difficult to engage with? Why?
- How does your approach to others compare with your peers?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
No evidence of seeking to understand the needs/ concerns of others. Fails to appreciate the value of engaging at this level with others		Demonstrates empathy & concern for the needs of others. Sees the value of engagement and effective relationships building
Lacks awareness/understanding of the impact of their actions on other		Shows high levels of self-awareness and an understanding of the impact of their behaviour/ actions on others
No evidence of seeking and responding to feedback and cues from others regarding the impact of their style		Picks up and responds to cues from others, adjusting their style accordingly
Fails to adapt style to suit the needs of the audience or the situation – what you see is what you get approach		Consciously adapts style to suit the needs of the situation and audience
No evidence of being able to engage with a diverse range of people		Interacts effectively with diverse range of people. Knows who they need to engage with and how best to do this
Style may create barriers between self and others		Puts other people at ease
Fails to engage others and seek their ideas/opinions and contributions. Tends to transmit rather than encourage a two way dialogue/flow of information		Respects the ideas/opinions and contributions – proactively seeks input from others

May engage others but no evidence of actively listening to their ideas/views and opinions		Is genuinely interested in the attitudes/views and opinions of others. Evidence of listening and responding to these
No evidence of modifying approach/plans to accommodate the needs, ideas and opinions of others		Adjusts course of action in the light of feedback and input from others – takes ideas and opinions on board
Favours the opinions/views of some over others		Is fair and unbiased in the treatment of others
Is not interested/concerned about how they are perceived by others or appreciate the importance/ impact of creating a positive first impression		Makes a strong positive first impression with others – appreciates what is needed to make a positive impression and conducts self accordingly

Summary of evidence: ______ **Rating (1–5):** ______

5. Making Sound Business Judgements

Makes sound decisions and commits to action based on the evaluation of complex information and consideration of alternative scenarios. Quickly cuts through the detail to identify the real issues, develops contingencies to deal with unexpected issues as they arise

> **Why this matters for Managers and directors in retail and wholesale:** Markdowns, stock allocation, staffing decisions, supplier negotiation, store-level pricing calls, escalation calls. The retail manager makes consequential decisions at pace, often with imperfect information, often in fast-changing trading conditions.

Describe a decision you made recently for which there was no established protocol.

- How did you go about making the decision? What worked well? Less well?
- How did you know what data was relevant/less relevant?
- How comfortable were you making it? How confident in its quality?
- What would have been the consequence of an incorrect/poor decision?
- How did you manage the risk?

Describe a situation where you had to choose between a number of alternative courses of action.

- Which did you choose? What criteria did you use to make the decision?
- What were the pros and cons of the other options?
- What was the outcome? What was the business impact of the decision?

Tell me about a time when you have challenged the information that you have been presented with.

- What was the source of the information?
- Why did you feel it was necessary to challenge it?
- What were the implications (e.g. how did your challenge impact on the final decision made)?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited thinking in novel situations. Fails to utilise all sources and/or effectively filter pertinent information		Seeks relevant information from a variety of sources, recognises what is pertinent
Accepts information at face value		Critically evaluates info. Probes/ challenges the facts
Fails to apply/adapt previous experience to new situations		Applies and adapts previous experience to novel situations
Is reluctant to make decisions in the absence of clear procedures or protocols		Makes and is prepared to stand by decisions in the absence of clear procedures and protocols

Uses the same style of decision making regardless of the situation		Considers the type of problem and how the decision needs to be made (e.g. when to direct, collaborate etc.)
Fails to consider a range of angles or the implications of different courses of action		Considers issues from a range of angles (e.g. cost, risk, impact, benefit, short and long term opportunities).
Approaches problems with interventions at the micro level		Takes a systemic approach to problem solving
Fails to consider the full range of alternatives or to accept that there may be alternative options		Considers a range of alternatives when making decisions
Lacks confidence in decision making when there is ambiguity or limited information		Deals with ambiguity and makes sound decisions on the basis of limited information
Considers the immediate impact of decisions/actions rather than their fit to the wider business agenda		Makes/monitors decisions against the wider organisational goals/strategy
No evidence of contingency/scenario planning in decision making		Makes detailed contingency plans to accommodate changing circumstances and mitigate risk
Fails to appreciate/articulate the risk associated with different courses of action		Understands the risk associated with different courses of action and builds plans to mitigate this

Summary of evidence: ______ **Rating (1–5):** ______