***Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs)***

**Overview**

The purpose of this guide is to help you think through your work accomplishments. It is usually considered dated material to include training, awards, speaking engagements, positions over 10 years. There are exceptions however. Try to go back over the last five years and write down your top 10. If you can’t come up with a top 10, go back 10 years. Remember, your applying for an executive level position, so the accomplishments need to reflect that level of experience, e.g., the GS-15 level.

Do not write a book for each accomplishment. Look at the template include and write a paragraph or two for each element in the CCAR format. Think about what you did, why it was done and the net result of your actions. Don’t be shy about taking credit. This ECQ example is all about you; not your boss, co-workers or the team. “I” did this or “I” met with. Not “the team did this” or “we met with…”

Keep in mind if you are selected for the job, this document is going to OPM for certification. Without QRB certification, you’ll never get the job. Therefore, it is imperative that the document you submit, and the examples of accomplishments must be clear to all readers.

**Your Responsibility**

You are responsible for providing me with background information about the specific examples you select written in CCAR format (see format below). I am not expecting a professionally written document from you. I expect complete sentences that are clear follow. If something is not clear or doesn’t address the CCAR format properly, we will discuss and clarify it. Your job is to tell me the significance of this example. You have final say-so over the wording in the document. You review the work product and make any changes, deletions or additions you feel are necessary. Usually after a couple passes between us, we agree on completion.

**My Responsibility**

I will coach and mentor you in terms of understanding ECQ’s, strategy and what stories/examples are the most effective. My job is to write the narrative in a story like fashion, ensuring CCAR format and core competencies are addressed within the document. I will run the document through several grammar checkers to ensure there are no grammar or syntax errors.

**Leading Change Example**

Leading Change is the lead-in example and, in my opinion, the most important. Why? Because it’s about strategy, leadership and readers may form an opinion of the entire document based on what they read in the first couple pages. A place to start leading change is looking at your agency strategic plan. Does your story map to the strategic plan?

*I once worked with a client who was a GS-15 Program Manager for the US Air Force, responsible for the development of billion-dollar procurement packages for weapon systems.*

*In her first example of leading change, she listed “Creation of a Microsoft Word template to facilitate the procurement process” as a significant accomplishment. In her eyes, it was a monumental achievement. During my 1st discussion with her, I told her anyone can create an MS Word template. “Not like this one she said.” I asked her to explain. She went on in length discussing the problems leading up to procurement. Procurement planning, requirements definition, cost analysis and average cost calculations were inconsistent, not repeatable nor measurable, and lacked standards. Acquisition packages varied from one acquisition to the next causing numerous acquisition delays, increased procurement costs and unwanted congressional oversight. She told me this was significant because lack of inconsistency and adherence to standards also led to increased costs to weapon systems that potentially affected military readiness and national security.*

*During the discussion, the light bulb inside her head lit. After talking it through, she realized her example needed to focus on strategy (why) rather than tactics (developing a word template).*

*She had verbalized the context and challenge. Her vision was to create an end to end procurement process which streamlined and standardized the USAF weapon system procurement process. Now I then asked her to list the leadership actions she took to make this happen.*

*When rewriting the example, the context became a high-level overview of the USAF weapon system procurements (gives the reader insight), the challenges (the problems) were enumerated (some listed above), the actions she took (a little bit more than creating a word document) and the results of her efforts (positive results).*

*I advised her not to mention the word template as an action took. Why? Because the template was nothing more than a minor work product. Noting the creation of a word template trivialized the profound nature of the challenge. I advised her to use a more business-like term like “the creation of standard operating procedure” and associated acquisition artifacts.*

*The story was rewritten to reflect the challenge, her strategy and organizational vision and what she had to do to effect organizational change.*

**Context Challenge Action Results (CCAR)**

OPM has a recommended format for writing the Executive Core Qualifications, called the CCAR (Challenge, Context, Action, and Result) Model. For the standard ECQ submission, the ECQ’s must be in the CCAR format in order to be approved. The QRB (Qualifications Review Board) must be able to discern your executive and leadership capabilities. The QRB certifies ECQ’s, not the hiring agency.

The key is to give readers—executive resources staff, rating and selecting officials, and QRB members—specific information about your achievements. Be sure to include professional and volunteer experience, education, training, and awards that demonstrate your skills in a particular Executive Core Qualification (ECQ).

Begin your ECQ statement with a brief summary of your executive experience. Then use the following approach to describe your accomplishments.

**Challenge: What was the specific problem that you faced that needed resolution?**

It should be at large organizational level, with agency-wide, government-wide, or national effects or impacts.

Examples: Staff reductions, budget cuts, constraints, reorganizations, people problems, morale, new legislation, unwanted oversight, performance problems, implementation of new programs, changes to existing programs, training, lack of skills, etc.

**Context: Background information to give the reader insight into the story. After anyone reads the context and challenge, if written properly, should have some idea what the story is all about.**

It should include redefinition of goals, changes in conditions, and some requirements to gain other people/organizations to comply with your changed direction.

Be specific in terms of factors that made the challenge substantial resources, people, laws, regulations, deadlines, and complexity.

Example

*I had a client who was applying for the Director position at the US Mint in Denver. In leading change, one of his examples was implementing a methodology called “Lean Enterprise for production.” If you didn’t know much about the mint or Lean Enterprise, you might be confused.*

*We added the following context. “The United States Mint is the largest circulating coin and precious metal bullion coin producer in the world, At its core, the mint is a manufacturing operation with over 1,700 employees and six different sites. Lean Enterprise is a proven, highly successful production solution for eliminating waste, increasing productivity and improving the quality of operations.”*

If you were on the QRB and read this, you might have a better understanding of the mission of the mint and what Lean Enterprise is.

**Action: What did you do that made a difference?**

What exactly did you do? Chances are you met with different senior leaders, peers, etc., across your agency, department or throughout the government. Developing a strategy is something you should state, even if it’s not on paper.

This is usually ECQ specific. For example leading people should list actions related to team-building, coaching, mentoring, improving morale, dealing with conflict management and diversity; all are important topics.

**Result: What difference did it make?**

Metrics and quantifiable results are one of the most important components of the ECQs. Use qualitative results if you have them.

Other things to consider include: decrease cycle time, cost improvements, meeting project schedules, no scope increase, reduced risk, increased performance (would be nice to state how much, even if it’s a guess), increase in customer satisfaction, reduced backlog, improved customer relationships (good if you have anecdotal evidence), awards (monetary or accolades), reduction in complaints, improvements in team cooperation, increase in skillsets to meet the challenges, and meeting external deadlines.

**Mapping Accomplishments**

Using your Top Ten List of Accomplishments, analyze each accomplishment to match the five ECQs. I will work with you to map stories to ECQ’s if you need help. You can use this space to create an outline of your accomplishments; just summarize each one with a short headline. Then you can begin to map where your accomplishments might fall within the core competencies.

**My Top Ten Career Accomplishments Outline**

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We will use this information to integrate our knowledge of the **ECQ Core Competencies** and your **Top Ten Accomplishments.** To help you get started on a successful draft, you will find CCAR templates for each ECQ below.

***ECQ 1—Leading Change***

In reviewing the competencies for Leading Change, the definitions clearly reveal that this ECQ is about **successfully leading organizational change**.

For example, Service Motivation (or customer service) indicates a significant paradigm change for some agencies. Applicants should indicate an example in which they have led or significantly contributed to a change in the organization through leadership resulting in improved customer service.

Additionally, it is important to tie ECQ responses to current agency or government-wide initiatives. You can easily tie this together with strategic thinking and vision, to change an organization’s approach to internal and external customers would be considered an example that demonstrated executive level experience. Then, you can tie it to continual learning, since you have learned much about change, and about ways and means to effect change to improve customer service. Can you link this to your agency’s strategic plan, goals and objectives? The first example of leading change should be your strongest example if possible. A good lead in sets the tone.

***CCAR TEMPLATE – Leading Change***

***Challenge:***

What was the organizational change you were trying to lead or direct? what barriers or problems were in place to prevent successful change?

***Context:***

What were the issues surrounding the change – Provide some background information to help the reader understand the story.

***Vision:***

Vision is important in this ECQ. Should be a one-liner.

***Action:***

What steps did you take personally to lead or effect the change?

***Result:***

What measurable results were achieved – how did you measure them, and how were they recognized?

***ECQ 2—Leading People***

As you read the leadership competencies, there is a key area to take note of – each of the leadership competencies is highlighting the personal actions taken by the applicant – not the actions taken by staff, or through others.

The examples in this ECQ should focus on the personal incidents that demonstrate what you did personally to lead people. I prefer to use two specific styles of stories:

1. Developing others – We all have inherited teams that lacked necessary skills. What did you do to address these deficiencies?
2. Conflict resolution – We all have inherited people problems that may have effected office morale, productivity or group performance. What actions did you take to correct this?

Other things to think about or blend into the stories:

* Have you coached or mentored?
* Facilitated team building sessions?
* What success have you had in the placement and retention of diverse applicants?
* How have you successfully managed conflict in your organization – what actions did you take and?
* Have you developed individual training plans, skills assessment, skills gap analysis?

***CCAR TEMPLATE – Leading People***

***Challenge:***

What was the challenge of leading people in this accomplishment / project?

***Context:***

Write the title of your position during this story, agency, city, state, country, date. Who were you leading? How many? What kinds of professionals?

***Action:***

What actions did you take lead people in this project? Or, HOW did you lead people in this project?

***Result:***

Were your leadership skills successful? If so, how can you demonstrate this through performance, higher morale, collaboration?

***ECQ 3—Results Driven***

In responding to Results Driven, you should describe a management or leadership situation where you demonstrated your personal accountability and commitment to achieving results.

In reviewing your work or volunteer experience, you should choose an example where you have been challenged to improve customer service (a key area in the President’s Management Agenda), explaining how you have used your problem solving abilities to develop a solution, and decisions that you made throughout the process (including those that were unpopular!).

You should address your technical credibility by demonstrating your ability to achieve results in a large organization or corporation by getting things done through administrative and other processes – these may often represent significant challenges in achieving results!

***CCAR TEMPLATE – Results Driven***

***Challenge:***

What results were you striving to achieve?

***Context:***

Write the title of your position during this story, agency, city, state, country, date. What was the situation?

***Action:***

What steps did you take personally to achieve results? Please use “I” with Actions.

***Result:***

What measurable results were achieved – how did you measure them, and how were they recognized? Give metrics if possible.

***ECQ 4—Business Acumen***

Business Acumen is typically one of the most difficult ECQs to write. The ECQ is very broad, and asks for examples across all aspects of business. The best way to approach this ECQ may be to find 3 or 4 smaller examples, instead of only two examples.

You should describe a management or leadership situation where you demonstrated leadership in at least **two of the three leadership competencies.**

For example, you may have provided **leadership and direction in the automation** of an agency level process or procedure.

You may have **managed large scale budgets**, in which you were responsible for successful **formulation and execution**, but you have had to **defend requested increases**, or develop a plan of action when **funding levels** were not approved.

You may have **participated in the development or assessment of human resources tools**, such as a **new performance evaluation system** or other HR tools.

***CCAR TEMPLATE – Business Acumen***

***Challenge:***

What was the challenge of this business, information technology or human resources situation, problem or need? What challenge did you face for the “operations” or “administration” or a major program?

***Context:***

Write the title of your position during this story, agency, city, state, country, date. Give details of the background for this challenge.

***Action:***

What steps did you take personally to manage this IT, finance or human resources challenge, project or change?

***Result:***

What happened? Did you achieve your objectives? If so, what was improved? Give numbers if possible.

***ECQ 5—Building Coalitions***

The key to this ECQ is the effective development of partnerships and managing key negotiations in support of agency goals and objectives.

In general, OPM is looking for experience in developing and maintaining effective cross-agency relationships and partners that facilitate the greater efficiency, effectiveness or customer service of the government.

Try to aim for examples of coalitions that have stood the test of time. Examples like facilitating or planning an event are usually the least successful.

* Have you built an inter-agency organization?
* Did you cross over agency lines, or reach out to private industry, in order to get something done?
* Have you improved your organization’s performance by working with others?
* Did you get a bill passed or work closely with Congress?

***CCAR TEMPLATE – Building Coalitions***

***Challenge:***

What was the challenge of a Building Coalition situation?

***Context:***

Write the title of your position during this story, agency, city, state, country, date. Give background on the situation where the coalition building was created. Or give background on briefing or negotiation.

***Action:***

Write your actions that resulted in a successful coalition or communication. Write at least 4-5 actions for each if possible.

***Result:***

What was the result or outcome? Was there a continuing coalition? Were there improved relationships and collaboration?