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PERSONAL EXPERIENCE QUESTIONS

Interviewer = "I"

Interviewee = Candidate = "C"

*Highlighted in **red**: context*

*Highlighted in **green**: problem/ challenge*

*Highlighted in **blue**: measures taken*

*Highlighted in **orange**: Results & lessons learned*

Note: This is a fictitious sample written only for education purposes. It tries to resemble a real interview: however, the conversation flow and questions asked by the interviewer vary greatly from one person to another.

I: Ready?

C: Yes.

I: Tell me about a situation where your opinion was different from the rest and you managed to convince them.

C: **This story happened 2 years ago when I was working for a small think tank in Guatemala. I was relatively new there and I was put in charge of conducting an analysis about the footwear sector. The purpose was to identify which workers had the worst working conditions to then develop a project to improve them.**

I: If you had to summarize the story in a title, which one would that be?

C: (After a few seconds) How to convince your team to not always say yes to a client.

I: OK, you can continue.

C: **The problem started soon after I arrive in Guatemala to do the field work. After 2 days I realized that we weren't targeting the right sector for two reasons. First, working conditions were already relatively good. Second, the sector had limited growth potential, so it wasn't strategic to channel the money there. I raised...**

I: Were you working alone?

C: No. I had the support of a local team who were assisting with the research and interviews. **I raised this issue to the local team as soon as possible,(1) so they could talk to the donor and ask to target another sector. However, they said that they didn't want to upset the donor and asked me to continue with my task.**

I: What did you do then?

C: **I did two things.(2) First, to convince the local team that the sector was not good; second, to understand the politics behind the donor's decision, so we could influence it.**

To convince the team, I went to their office and showed them the initial findings and the projected returns (optimistic, pessimistic) on our investment if we targeted that sector. They were not encouraging.

I: Did they argue with your results?

C: No. They didn't have expertise in the sector, so it would have been difficult for them. Despite that, they were still reluctant to speak with the donor. That led to the second part of my plan: moving to politics.

I did some research and learnt that the donor was pushing for that sector only because they wanted to be aligned with the Guatemalan government – which was promoting that sector. Together with the team, we started to look for other sectors more attractive that a) had the support of the government and b) had bad working conditions and good growth potential. (3) We found one: business process outsourcing.

I: How you communicate this to the donor?

C: **I wasn't in the meeting because it happened when I was gone plus we decided that the local team was in a better position to do it. (4) They were already known by the donor. However, I worked with them in preparing the presentation and a brief to convince them to reconsider their decision. (5)**

At the end the donor was pleased that we were straightforward and had an alternative ready for them. It was a success.

I helped me realize that dealing with a client is not only about presenting facts and figures, but understanding their motivations and internal politics.

I: Great. Let's now move to the business case.

Comment from Consulting Challenge: Generally, the interview went well. The candidate has taken time to prepare the story and structure it. Despite the story being quite complex, s/he managed to select only the most important parts, keeping the answer within the time limits. Responses to the interviewer are clear and straightforward. The candidate must look the interviewer in the eye.

(1) In line with McKinsey "Obligation to dissent".¹

(2) Numbering is useful to avoid the interviewer being lost.

(3) Repeating the criteria (briefly) helps the interviewer follow the story.

(4) This shows strategic thinking; the candidate is aware of how to best communicate with client.

¹ In this context, "dissent" simply means speaking up you disagree with something being done or discussed. The "obligation" comes from the fact that at McKinsey, voicing your dissent is not optional, it is required.

(5) This shows teamwork.