

# **True-to-Life™ Leader Situational Judgment Test Candidate Preparation Guide**

**Prepared By:**



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# TRUE-TO-LIFE™ LEADER SITUATIONAL JUDGMENT TEST (SJT)

## I. Situational Judgment Test (SJT) Description

The True-to-Life™ Leader SJT was designed and validated specifically for use in assessing candidates as part of the pre-hire process for individuals in leadership, supervisory, and early management positions in a range of industries, including manufacturing, financial services, retail, and public administration. The SJT contains nine scenarios, each presented as a brief enactment of a relevant workplace situation that might be faced by a leader. After viewing a scenario, candidates must evaluate a set of 5 possible alternative actions the leader might take in response to the challenge presented in that scenario. Candidates indicate how effective they believe each possible alternative action would be in that scenario. The effectiveness rating scale that will be used for each possible action is presented below:

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Ineffective	Somewhat Ineffective	Neutral	Somewhat Effective	Highly Effective

When rating the effectiveness of each potential action, candidates should consider only the information presented in the scenario. If knowledge of any specific policy or procedure is needed to determine appropriate responses to a scenario, that information will be explicitly provided in the scenario description.

## II. **Preparation Strategies for the Situational Judgment Test (SJT)**

The SJT does not test for job-specific knowledge, so there are no materials to study in advance of the assessment. You can, however, prepare by:

- thinking through how you might handle various work-related scenarios or challenges as a leader,
- reflecting back on how you have effectively or ineffectively handled past work-related situations or challenges as a leader and analyzing what actions on your part led to positive or negative outcomes in those situations, and/or
- recalling any particularly effective or ineffective actions you have witnessed other leaders taking in various work-related situations and analyzing the specific actions they took that led to positive or negative outcomes in those situations.

You can also improve your performance on the SJT in a couple of different ways. First, know and understand the test situation so that you can avoid making mistakes caused by a failure to understand the meaning of test questions, test format, or test procedures. Second, you can try to gain an understanding of your own test-taking behavior. If you become aware of the kinds of errors that are common on SJTs, you can try to avoid them. This section of the Guide provides suggestions for improving your performance in each of these areas:

- **Situational Judgment Test-Taking Strategies - Understanding the Test Situation:** This section provides some strategies that you can apply when taking the SJT. These strategies include such suggestions as systematically breaking down the rating scale and answering easier questions first.
- **Common Pitfalls - Understanding Your Own Test-Taking Behavior:** This section provides information about common pitfalls in test-taking in general, in SJTs in particular, and reasons why you might face such pitfalls. You are encouraged to identify the kinds of behaviors you might tend to engage in by reading through this list. In this way, you will be more aware of the tendency toward these pitfalls when you take the test and can determine what steps you can take to avoid them.

### A. **Situational Judgment Test-Taking Strategies**

The purpose of the SJT is to evaluate your judgment regarding effective versus ineffective behaviors in a variety of work-related situations. To aid you in preparing for and completing the SJT, we offer the following suggestions.

#### **1. Make sure you understand the test format and requirements.**

- a) Read all directions carefully.
- b) Read each scenario and all potential actions carefully before attempting to rate them. Scenarios and potential actions are brief, so re-reading may be a good use of your time to ensure you have not misunderstood anything in the scenario or potential actions.
- c) Make sure you know how to use the rating scale to rate the effectiveness of each potential action.

#### **2. Proceed through the scenarios strategically.**

- a) Break down the rating scale. First, think about whether each potential action for the given scenario is generally “effective,” generally “ineffective,” or “neutral.” Imagine the person in the situation responding in the way that is described in the given item. Then think about whether that action would generally make the situation better, worse, or would have no effect. When thinking about the ramifications of the given action, you may want to consider the impact that action would have on others described in the scenario. Consider things such as whether the action promotes or inhibits teamwork and/or productivity, is consistent with any expressly stated rules or policies, and whether the action demonstrates strong levels of responsibility, adaptability, leadership, professionalism, etc. If you believe the given action would make the situation better, you should respond by selecting a rating on the “effective” side of the scale. If you believe the given action would make the situation worse, you should respond by selecting a rating on the “ineffective” side of the scale. If you believe the action would have no effect, you should respond by selecting the “Neutral” rating.

One question often asked by candidates is what constitutes “the situation” in the scenario – i.e., what if a given action resolves or improves some aspects of the situation but in the meantime, causes other issues or makes other aspects of the situation worse? You should consider every aspect of the situation in this case. If the net effect is for the action to help more than it hurts, then you should rate the action somewhere on the effective side of the scale. If the net effect is for the action to cause more issues than it resolves (or to hurt more than it helps), then you should rate the action somewhere on the ineffective side of the scale.

Once you have determined whether the potential action is effective or ineffective, then think about the degree to which that response is either effective or ineffective. If a given response is extremely or very likely to improve the situation, or likely to resolve most or all of the issue, then you should select the “Highly Effective” rating. If you believe a given response is somewhat likely to improve the situation, or if the response would resolve some or part of the issue, then you should select the “Somewhat Effective” rating. Similarly, on the ineffective side of the scale, if you believe an action would be extremely or very likely to worsen the situation, you should select the “Highly Ineffective” rating. If you believe an action would be somewhat likely to worsen the situation, you should select the “Somewhat Ineffective” rating. If you believe the action would have no real impact, positively or negatively, you should select the “Neutral” rating.

- b) Rate the “easier” potential actions first. As you read the potential actions for a given scenario, you may find that some of those actions are easy to rate (e.g., they are clearly “Highly Effective” or clearly “Ineffective”). Rate those potential actions first to get them out of the way, and then spend time thinking about the actions that may be a little more difficult to judge. Don’t forget to use the strategy described above in step (a) to evaluate the effectiveness of the potential actions.
- c) Take a brief mental break when needed. Although you need to take the test in one sitting, if you feel that your ability to concentrate is decreasing at points during the test, take a brief mental break. Close your eyes and take a minute to clear your mind and relax before returning to the question.
- d) Answer every question. You will not be penalized for incorrect answers, aside from simply not getting as much credit as for correct answers. So even if you must guess,

be sure to rate every potential action. While your guesses may not be correct, the alternative is to leave these actions blank and be guaranteed to get them wrong.

## **B. Common Pitfalls**

There are several common reasons candidates might choose an incorrect rating for a potential action. Seven of these reasons are presented below along with suggestions for avoiding these errors.

1. **Misreading the rating scale:** Candidates may mistakenly rate a potential action differently from how they intended to rate it, simply due to misreading the scale. Be sure to make note of the scale anchors (1 = Highly Ineffective, 2 = Somewhat Ineffective, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Effective, 5 = Highly Effective) and the directionality of the rating scale - lower ratings indicate ineffective responses and higher ratings indicate effective responses.

In a similar vein, note that the rating scale asks about the *effectiveness* of each potential action. You are NOT to rate the *likelihood* that someone (including you) might take the action listed. Instead, you are to rate, if the individual in that scenario did take the listed action, how effective that action would be.

2. **Misunderstanding the instructions or making false assumptions:** Candidates may fail to fully read the instructions or may assume they already know how to proceed without reading the instructions. The instructions for rating the potential actions will be presented with each new scenario. It is important that you understand the instructions before rating the potential actions.

**Important Note:** You do NOT have to select a different rating for every potential action to the same scenario. You may rate more than one action as Somewhat Effective, more than one as Highly Ineffective, etc. Similarly, you do NOT have to use every rating point on the scale when evaluating the potential actions within a given scenario. In other words, it is NOT necessary to assume that every scenario will include at least one potential action at each of the five levels of effectiveness. Within any given scenario, you may find that there are no potential actions to which you give a rating of “Highly Effective,” or no actions to which you give a rating of “Ineffective,” etc.

An example is provided below of a scenario with five potential actions. The darkened numbered circles indicate the effectiveness rating selected by the candidate for each potential action. Notice that, in this example, a rating of “Somewhat Ineffective” is given to two of the potential actions, and the rating of “Highly Ineffective” is not used at all. As previously mentioned, there is no requirement to select a rating from each point on the scale for the potential actions for the same scenario.

## Scenario Example

A brief description of a scenario involving a leader will be presented here.

**Instructions:** A number of possible responses to this scenario are listed below. Read each response option and then rate how effective each response is to the scenario, using the scale provided.

	1 Highly Ineffective	2 Somewhat Ineffective	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat Effective	5 Highly Effective
A. Leader takes action A in response to the scenario above.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B. Leader takes action B in response to the scenario above.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C. Leader takes action C in response to the scenario above.	①	②	③	④	⑤
D. Leader takes action D in response to the scenario above.	①	②	③	④	⑤
E. Leader takes action E in response to the scenario above.	①	②	③	④	⑤

- Mistakenly viewing the potential scenario actions as interdependent:** Within any given scenario, the listed actions that the leader might take in response to that scenario are NOT to be viewed as chronological or as interdependent in any way. The responses do NOT build on one another. Instead, each potential action listed for a scenario is meant to be viewed and rated independently from the other actions. Be sure to rate each potential action separately.
- Misreading part of the scenario or potential action by overlooking a keyword or phrase:** The solution to this problem is taking the time to read carefully and thoroughly, re-reading if necessary. Make note of key words or phrases that may indicate the most effective ways in which to respond to a situation. Be sure not to overlook critical words such as “not” – for example, “this individual has not been trained on this technique.” Overlooking the word “not” in this phrase could lead to faulty assumptions about the most effective actions to take in a scenario that involves assigning the best resources to manage a particular situation.
- Not sticking to the scenario as presented:** When evaluating SJT potential actions, it is tempting to make assumptions or jump to conclusions based on preconceived notions or past experiences related to the scenario being described. Be careful NOT to make assumptions or jump to conclusions. Focus on the information provided in the scenario. Do not assume or add information or think about “what ifs” such as, “If the individual in the scenario has this type of personality, I might respond differently,” or “If this has been an ongoing issue, then this might be an appropriate response,” etc. Focus solely on the information provided when reading and thinking about the scenario and potential actions. If there is added information that is needed (e.g., information about personality conflicts, background stating that an issue is ongoing or has occurred repeatedly), that information



will be clearly stated in the scenario. If some challenge, problem, or conflict is not stated in the scenario itself, do NOT assume it exists and do NOT let such an assumption impact your responses.

Similarly, focus on the potential actions that are provided. It may be that the course of action YOU would take is not listed as an option, or that you can think of other, more or less effective, alternative actions that are not listed as potential actions. Do not allow yourself to be distracted by thinking about alternative actions that are not provided. Focus on the potential actions that are listed, and the context provided around those actions in the scenario.

- 6. Committing common rating errors or biases:** When using any kind of rating scale, such as the effectiveness rating scale that will be used to rate the potential actions, candidates often tend to have natural biases that lead them to only use specific portions of the scale. One common bias is to use only the extremities of the scale – in this case, only “Highly Effective” or “Highly Ineffective.” Another common bias is to avoid those extreme ratings and only use the middle points of the scale – in this case, the “Neutral” or “Somewhat” options. Other common biases involve being overly “lenient” by rating every potential action somewhere on the “effective” side of the scale or instead being overly “critical” by rating every potential action somewhere on the “ineffective” side of the scale.

The key to overcoming these errors or biases is to re-read the meaning of each anchor and systematically think through how effective each potential action is. Look back at strategy A2a (*Proceed through the scenarios strategically – Break down the rating scale*) as a reminder.

- 7. Rushing or not taking enough time to think through your ratings:** Be careful not to rush through the reading of the scenarios and the rating of the potential actions. Do not agonize for several minutes over one potential action, but do take the time needed to carefully read and consider the action. Some additional tips for systematically thinking through your ratings of the potential actions include:
- Have an answer in mind before you look over the potential actions. Thinking about the most effective action for a scenario may help you anticipate what effective versus ineffective actions might look like, which can aid you in rating the potential actions that are listed. Be careful, however, not to dismiss all listed potential actions as ineffective simply because they do not match exactly what YOU might do in that situation. Keep in mind there may be several effective (and by extension several ineffective) actions for addressing any given challenge.
  - Consider the rationale behind your rating of each potential action. If someone were to ask you why you rated a particular action as Somewhat Ineffective, as Highly Effective, etc., would you be able to provide a reason? If not, you may wish to re-think your rating.

### III. Situational Judgment Test (SJT) Example Scenario

A sample scenario is provided below to give you an idea of what to expect on the True-to-Life™ Leader SJT. This scenario is meant to illustrate the nature of the SJT you will complete. The instructions, scenario description, and format (i.e., listing of potential actions with associated effectiveness rating scale) mirror what you will see during the actual SJT. In the actual SJT, the brief scenario description will also be followed by a short video enacting dialog between the leader and team member(s). Of course, the video portion cannot be demonstrated in this written guide, but a written version of the dialog is provided in the sample below.

The scoring key (i.e., effectiveness rating that is considered most accurate) is provided on the next page. You may use the scenario as practice and then look to the next page for the answer key and rationale.

#### Example Scenario

Background: You are the leader of a small team of employees. Two of your team members approach you to discuss one of their colleagues, Alex.

Team Member 1: “We wanted to discuss some concerns we have about Alex.”

You: “OK, please go ahead. I’m listening.”

Team Member 2: “Alex is just very difficult to work with. He doesn’t technically violate any policies or procedures, but he is not helpful to colleagues, is curt with people, and does not get along with anyone else on staff.”

Team Member 1: “Yes, everyone is starting to complain about having to work with Alex.”

**Instructions:** A number of possible responses to this scenario are listed below. Read each response option and then rate **how effective** each response is to the scenario, using the scale provided.

	1 Highly Ineffective	2 Somewhat Ineffective	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat Effective	5 Highly Effective
A. Tell Alex he will have to change his behavior or face discipline.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B. Ask Alex questions to try and discover if there are underlying reasons for his behavior.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C. Tell the team members that there is nothing you can do because Alex is not violating any policies.	①	②	③	④	⑤
D. Immediately reprimand Alex for his behavior.	①	②	③	④	⑤
E. Meet privately with Alex, explain how his behavior negatively affects those around him, and try to agree on an action plan for improving his interactions.	①	②	③	④	⑤

In the Example Scenario listed on the previous page:

- Option A is considered Somewhat Ineffective (2) because, although there may indeed need to be consequences for Alex if he ultimately cannot find a way to work effectively with others, resorting to a threat as an initial way to address his behavior is unlikely to improve his desire to work well within the team. It may even prevent a good relationship between you and Alex.
- Option B is considered Somewhat Effective (4) because you are making an effort to understand the reasons behind Alex's behavior. This is a good first step toward understanding how the situation could be improved.
- Option C is considered Highly Ineffective (1) because saying/doing nothing is very unlikely to help resolve the issue, and Alex will continue with the negative behaviors. In addition, telling the other team members that there is nothing you can do is very likely to make the situation worse by undermining your own authority and reputation as a leader, and by angering, or at best disappointing, the rest of the team.
- Option D is considered Highly Ineffective (1) because reprimanding Alex is inappropriate as an initial step when there has been no attempt to discuss the situation with Alex, verify what is actually happening, understand the reasons behind his behavior, or even determine if Alex is aware of his behavior.
- Option E is considered Highly Effective (5) because you are addressing the situation directly and openly with Alex, attempting to ensure he understands the impact of his behavior, and seeking agreement from Alex on actions he can take to improve his interactions with others.

## **CONCLUSION**

We hope that this Guide gives you a better understanding of what to expect for the True-to-Life™ Leader SJT and provides you with some test-taking tips and suggestions for preparation. The suggestions provided here are not exhaustive; we encourage you to engage in additional preparation strategies that you believe will enhance your chances of performing effectively on the assessment.

**BEST OF LUCK!**