

A guide to Behavioral Interviewing



- Assumes that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior.
- Employer asks *specific* questions about past behaviors, and asks for an example of how a person acted in former work or life settings.
- The answers given by the applicant help the interviewer develop a *profile of behaviors* that a candidate will likely display on the job.
- Results from a behavioral interview identify not only skills and knowledge but also the personal and performance attributes needed to succeed within the culture of a specific organization.
- Behavioral Interviewing methods rely more on facts and direct observation and so are thought to be more "scientific," therefore limiting the effect of "personal impressions" on the overall evaluation.
- Behavioral interviews help provide structure to the interviewing process.

What Makes Behavioral Interviewing Different from other types of interviews

Types of interviews can include one-on-one, group interview, search committee, hiring manager, human resources, phone interview and lunch interview. Most of these types follow a *traditional* line of questioning. Behavioral interviewing is different from traditional interviewing in many ways:

Traditional	Behavioral
Allows for general questions that may elicit rehearsed, ideal statements that may be similar in all applicants, "What are your main strengths and weaknesses? Why are you the best candidate for this job? What will you do once you get here?"	Asks specific questions about past behaviors that elicit different answers from each applicant. Discourages theoretical responses, allows the interviewer to get more candid responses about actual behaviors.
Is easier for the candidate to get the interviewer to do a larger amount of talking during the interview,	Interview is structured so that the candidate does most or all of the talking. The interviewer can keep the interview focused on areas most important to him/her, not the candidate.
Less interaction.	More interaction with follow-up and probing questions.

Behavioral interviewing also claims the following: to target more information more easily, to be more structured, and to increase the likelihood that the interviewer will take more notes.

Characteristics of Behavioral Questions

They produce behavioral stories or reports:

Applicants are directed to tell about what they have done and said in past work situations. Questions are carefully constructed by the interviewer to get the applicant to generate behavioral stories.

They discourage theoretical responses:

Questions are specific and ask for the description of past behaviors, *not* for opinions or philosophies. The applicant will most likely not have the opportunity to present a "rehearsed" answer.

They do not require, or lead to, the "correct" answer:

Applicants are asked for description, and questions asked do not imply a "correct" answer. A variety of answers may all be acceptable, depending on what specific behaviors the employer is looking for.

Answers are often "probed":

If the interviewer does not feel that the applicant is generating enough description or wants to probe further to check for content, he/she might ask the applicant more detailed follow-up questions, such as "Lead me thorough your decision-making process," or "What were you thinking when that happened?"

Tips for the Interviewer

- Take notes! You will be asking a lot of applicants a lot of detailed questions, and you want to be able to separate them.
- Do not allow an interviewee to generalize or theorize in response to one of your questions. Look for *tenses* in response. You are NOT looking for "Well, *if were* in that situation, I *would...*" but you ARE looking for "When I *was* in that situation at my last job, I *did...*"
- Try not to let the applicant off the hook when he/she can't think of a response. It is a good idea to let the applicant know at the beginning of the interview that it is a behavioral interview, that you will be looking for past actions or behaviors, and that you realize that thinking of past examples on demand can be tough. Then, if the applicants have difficulty, remind them that they can take their time until they think of an appropriate example.
- Be non-threatening and friendly.
- A typical behavioral interview lasts one to one and one-half hours. Let the applicant know this beforehand.
- Review job specifics well in advance of interviewing. Go over job descriptions with managers. Determine what skills are needed, what experiences would be helpful, which type of personality would fit in well with the company.
- Be sure to probe each applicant on how they handle failure.
- Review each resume for gaps and points to clarify.

Common Mistakes the Interviewer can Watch for

Giving "Just the Facts"

Some applicants will give a "skeleton" of a story. An appropriate answer to a behavioral question should contain good content, be descriptive and should follow a STAR pattern. Each answer should have some kind of "support." An applicant who is giving "Just the Facts" might be probed with follow-up questions to get at details.

Rambling

On the other side of the spectrum, an applicant may give too long of a response. An appropriate behavioral response should not focus on length on time spent on the answer or quality of words. A candidate who "rambles" can be directed toward being more specific by asking them to frame their responses around the task, action and outcome.

Twisting

Some applicants will try to answer a behavioral question with a theoretical response that may or may not be rehearsed, or in an attempt to avoid revealing negative information. LISTEN carefully, and redirect the "twisting" applicant to share with you *past* behaviors.

Sample Questions

Coping Skills:

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills.

Decision-Making and Problem-Solving:

Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Give me an example of a problem you have faced on the job and tell me how you solved it.

Tell me about a time when you needed to resolve a problem. What caused the problem? What did you do? What were the results?

Describe a problem situation where you had to seek out relevant information, define key issues, and decide on which steps to take to get the desired results.

Goal Setting:

Give me an example of an important goal you had set and tell me about your progress toward reaching that goal.

Describe an instance when you had your sights on a high/demanding goal and saw it through to completion, despite obstacles.

Provide an example of how you assessed a situation and achieved good results by focusing on the most important priorities.

Creativity and Imagination:

Describe an innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or process.

Conflict Resolution:

Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

Leadership:

Give me an example of when you had to show good leadership. Summarize a situation where you took the initiative to get others going on an important issue, and played a leading role to get the desired results.

Describe a situation where you had to make effective use of facts to secure the agreement of others.

Team Issues and Team Building:

Give me an example of how you worked effectively with people to achieve a desired result.

Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team with someone you did not get along with. What happened?

Skill Application:

Provide an example of how you used a technical skill and converted it into a practical application.

Describe an instance where you made effective use of facts to secure the agreement of others.

Stress Management:

Describe a situation where you had several things to do in a limited time, such as study for exams, complete lab assignments and maintain part time work. What led to the situation? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?

Self-Exploration:

What qualifications do you have for this job?

What actions and behaviors from your past jobs make you the best candidate for this job?

Failure:

Describe for me a time when you failed at something and tell me how you responded.

Perception and Assessment:

Describe for me an example of when you assessed a situation and achieved good results by focusing on the most important priorities.

Assertiveness**Clarification****Commitment to Task****Corporate Policies and Procedures****Dealing with Ambiguity****Problem Solving and Analysis****Listening****Management Skills****Communication Skills****Organizing and Planning****Focus**

Follow-Up or "Probing" Questions: Can you give me an example of that? What did you do? What did you say? What were you thinking at that point? What was your role? What was the result?

Tips for the Applicant

Key Issues

- *LISTENING* is key- Make sure to answer the question as it is presented. Ask for clarification if needed.
- *Review your Resume* before attending the interview, as this will aid to refresh your memory on your recent accomplishments. Also realize that the employer may ask questions regarding gaps or unclear points on your resume. The employer might also ask you to provide examples from areas that you "bulleted" or highlighted on your resume. Be prepared to do so.
- Although answers should be centered around work, don't forget to use effective examples from school, volunteering, or activities. You may also want to use an example of which you are extremely proud, such as a personal accomplishment.
- Never speak negatively about past employers.
- Your ability *to handle failure* will be probed. Try to think of a few job related errors and review what you learned and how you changed as a result.
- Answers should be relatively brief, specific, *honest*, and to the point. Give details when probed.

Tips for the Applicant

Answering Behavioral Questions

Each behavioral story should have a beginning, middle and end. The best way to structure your answers is with the STAR model:

- S= Situation:** Background, describe the situation briefly.
- T= Task:** What was the task at hand? What did you have to do? What exactly was the problem?
- A= Action:** What action did you take to remedy the situation? What/How/When did you do it? What *specific* steps did you take? Why might your action have been important?
- R= Results:** What happened as a result of your action? Describe the outcomes. How were people affected? What did you learn?

Answering behavioral questions is a snap if you follow the STAR model. Just keep it in mind, and remember...

Don't Panic!!

Tips for the Applicant

Know the Potential Job & Know the Potential Employer

Nothing can help you better *predict* what questions will be asked in a behavioral interview than by knowing the potential job for which you are applying, and by knowing about the potential employer.

Know the Potential Job:

- Request a copy of the job description and review it thoroughly.
- Request a copy of your potential supervisor's job description and of your potential subordinate's job description.
- After reviewing the descriptions, ask yourself how you could use your skills, knowledge and strengths to aid, facilitate, complete and develop different aspects of the job.

Know the Potential Employer:

Why?

- Time won't be wasted on issues that could have been answered by reading the organization's literature
- Shows the employer that you are serious about the opportunity and that you have the initiative
- Makes you stand out from your competitors who did not do their research
- The better you will be able to anticipate questions and fine tune answers
- Helps you to reduce your anxiety by knowing you are prepared

What

- Structure of the organization
- Division of departments that interest you
- Products and services
- Size of organization (number of stores, employees, etc.)
- History of the organization
- Length of time in business
- Philosophy and objectives
- *Growth* and earnings
- New products, research or services planned
- Personnel policies and benefits
- Geographic locations of home office and divisions
- Career paths and training programs

How

- Request corporate literature and annual reports
- Check with reference librarians for resources
- Talk to others in the organization
- Visit the organization
- Attend job fairs
- Carefully read job descriptions and Help Wanted ads
- Review information at your university's Career Services office
- Research the employer using the World Wide Web

Tips for the Applicant

Know Yourself

Another *great* way to prepare for the behavioral interview is by knowing and understanding yourself and your skills. Follow these important guidelines to get started...It may seem like a lot of work, but not preparing can be a sure way to fail.

Know your EDUCATION

Step One: Develop a chronology of the schools that you have attended and the coursework taken

Answer the question: What does my education tell me about my skills?

Know your JOB HISTORY

Step One: Catalog your job history, including duties and responsibilities for each position worked

Step Two: For each position, list two major accomplishments

Then, *Answer the questions:* How did you achieve them? What did you have to overcome?

Step Three: For each accomplishment, list the skills and behaviors (actions) needed to achieve each one

Know your OVERALL STRENGTHS

Step One: List what you think are your major strengths, including skills and personality characteristics. Ask family members and friends for their opinion

Step Two: For each strength listed, give a positive example from job, school and life that demonstrates each skill.

Finally,

Match your skills to those skills that you have determined the employer might be looking for. Think of examples for those skills the employer wants that you don't have listed.

