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## The Behavioral Interview

Many companies increasingly rely on behavioral interviews because they believe previous behavior indicates future performance. In these interviews, employers use standardized methods to mine information relevant to your competency in a particular area or position. Depending upon the responsibilities of the job and the working environment, you might be asked to describe a time that required problem-solving skills, adaptability, leadership, conflict resolution, multi-tasking, initiative or stress management. Behavioral interviewing emphasizes past performance and behaviors. As a consequence, candidates unprepared for the rigor of behavioral interviewing have not fared well. Simply practicing the list of common interview questions no longer works. You will be asked how you dealt with the situations. Your responses require not only reflection, but also organization.

When you start to tell a behavioral story, the behavioral interviewer typically will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer will probe further for more depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." If you've told a story that's anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

The employer structures very pointed questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if the candidate possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: "Tell about a time..." or "Describe a situation..." Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

### Why should you prepare for behavioral interview?

- Using behavioral answers works well with inexperienced interviewers.
- Companies that invest the time and energy in developing behavioral interviews often attract top candidates. Top candidates make the company a more desirable place to work.

### How do I prepare for a behavioral interview?

As a candidate, you should be equipped to answer the questions thoroughly. Companies that employ behavioral interviewing have predetermined the skills, knowledge and behaviors (often referred to as competencies) they require for a particular position. These could include:

- Adaptability
- Communication-Oral
- Communication-Written
- Control
- Analysis
- Attention to Detail
- Decisiveness
- Delegation
- Development of Subordinates
- Energy
- Entrepreneurial
- Equipment Operation
- Insight
- Fact Finding-Oral
- Financial Analytical
- Flexibility
- Impact
- Independence
- Initiative
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Judgment
- Leadership/Influence
- Listening
- Motivation
- Negotiation
- Organizational
- Participative
- Sensitivity
- Management
- Planning and Organizing
- Practical Learning
- Presentation Skills
- Process Operation
- Rapport Building
- Resilience
- Risk Taking
- Safety Awareness
- Sales Ability/Persuasiveness
- Sensitivity
- Strategic Analysis
- Teamwork
- Technical/Professional Knowledge
- Technical/Professional Proficiency
- Tenacity
- Training

- Work Standards

The company determines the skill sets by doing a detailed analysis of the position they are seeking to fill. Job seekers also must go through this same process. To conduct a job analysis the job seeker should ask questions such as:

1. What are the necessary skills to do this job?
2. What makes a successful candidate?
3. What would make an unsuccessful candidate?
4. Why have people left this position previously?
5. What is the most difficult part of this job?

Once you have landed the interview, keep in mind the following points.

- Be detailed and specific. You should develop three stories that illustrate your past performance. Remember that the interviewer will be operating under the premise that "past performance in a similar setting is the best predictor of future performance."

#### Structured approach to responding to behavioral interview questions

To maximize your responses in the behavioral format, use the three-step STAR process defined below:

<p><b>Situation or Task</b></p>	<p>Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.</p>
<p><b>Action you took</b></p>	<p>Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.</p>
<p><b>Results you achieved</b></p>	<p>What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?</p>

- It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Arm yourself with a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions.
- Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to *negative* situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or -- better yet, those that had positive outcomes.
- Limit rambling and tangents. While you can't control what is asked, you can control what you say.

- Listen carefully to each question. If you are unsure, rephrase the question and ask for clarification. When you respond, be sure to recall your past accomplishments in detail.
- Anticipate the transferable skills and personal qualities that are required for the job.
- Review your resume. Any of the qualities and skills you have included in your resume are fair game for an interviewer to press.
- Reflect on your own professional, volunteer, educational and personal experience to develop brief stories that highlight these skills and qualities in you. You should have a story for each of the competencies on your resume as well as those you anticipate the job requires.
- Prepare stories by identifying the context, logically highlighting your actions in the situation, and identifying the results of your actions. Keep your responses concise and present them in less than two minutes.

### Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

#### *Decision Making and Problem Solving*

- Give me an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

#### *Leadership*

- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?

#### *Motivation*

- Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.

#### *Communication*

- Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

#### *Interpersonal Skills*

- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.

#### *Planning and Organization*

- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.

*Other Behavioral Questions*

- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.
- Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.