

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

What is a Behavioral Interview?

The behavioral interview is founded on the premise that **the best predictor of future performance is past performance**. Rather than asking you directly if you have a particular skill or trait (to which you would probably answer "yes!"), the interviewer asks you to provide an example of a time when you demonstrated the skill or trait that they are seeking.

On a behavioral interview, you can expect questions like "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of when...". Fill in the blanks with one of any number of skills, knowledge, or abilities the interviewer is trying to ascertain you have. For example, if conflict resolution is a required competency, the question may be "Tell me about a time two people you had to work with weren't getting along." If you have work experience, you can talk about two of your co-workers.

Behavioral Interviews vs. Traditional Interviews

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways.

- Instead of asking how you *would* behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you *did* behave.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.
- The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.
- You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories.
- Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

1. Determine what competencies the employer is looking for. Read through the job description.
2. Research the company to learn more about it. Once you know what competencies the company is looking for, you need to come up with specific examples of how you've demonstrated those competencies.
3. Next, looking back at your past jobs, try to answer the questions related to the competencies the job requires. Your time in school is also a good place to look. Like many new graduates, you may not have much experience in the paid work-force when you begin your job search. However, your experience in campus/community organizations and group projects provide excellent opportunities to demonstrate skills that employers are seeking.
4. Write down your stories. Be as specific as you can.
5. Do a practice interview with Career Services. The staff will conduct a professional practice interview with you and even RECORD it if you want!

Use the STAR technique

An effective response to a behavioral based interview question will possess certain characteristics. Describe the following:

Situation Task or problem Action taken Results

Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.

Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.

Be specific and be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.

Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).

Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.

EXAMPLE

A possible response for the question, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member wasn't pulling his or her weight" might go as follows:

"I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it upon yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

Skills and Matching Questions

Professional or technical knowledge

Describe a situation where your professional/technical expertise made a significant difference.

Decision making

Describe a situation where you handled decisions under pressure or when time limits were imposed?

Enthusiasm

Relate a scenario where you were responsible for motivating others.

Describe a really tough or long day and how you dealt with the situation?

Personal attributes or qualities

Tell me about a time when you set and accomplished short term, medium range and long term goals? What were the differences in your approach to each?

Unpleasant situations

Relate a personal story in which you persuaded someone to do something that initially did not appeal to them.

Team Work

Tell me about a time when communication broke down on your team and what happened. How would you do it differently the next time?

Leadership

Describe a scenario in which you have gone above and beyond what was expected of you.

Describe a time in which you took initiative rather than waiting to be told what to do.

Flexibility

Tell me about a time when you took a public stance on an issue and then had to change your position.

Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.

Communication

Tell me about a time when you did your best to resolve a customer or client concern and the individual still was not satisfied. What did you do next?

Describe an opportunity in which you've had to make a presentation to a large group. Describe an opportunity in which you've had to make a presentation to a small group. What did you do differently to prepare for each?

Additional Questions

Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.

Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

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

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Give me an example of an important goal you set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Describe the most significant or creative presentation which you have had to complete.