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## **Behavioral Interviewing: Letting Your Past Behavior Predict Your Future Performance**

The interview is the tool most employers use to make hiring decisions. However, traditional interviews usually ask candidates theoretical questions, which do not represent what a candidate would actually do in a certain situation. In addition, many candidates try to tell interviewers what they think s/he wants to hear and thus give rehearsed answers to questions. Therefore, many employers are moving away from traditional interview questions and including more behavioral interview questions in their interviews.

Behavioral interview questions ask job-related questions that assist the employers in making predictions about potential employees' future success based on their past behavior, instead of their responses to hypothetical questions. In addition, behavioral interview questions often minimize personal impressions that can affect hiring decisions.

### **Advantages of Behavioral Interviewing**

One of the advantages of the behavioral format is that it assists employers in evaluating candidates who have little or no traditional work experience. Candidates are not limited by their work history when answering behavioral interview questions.

Think of the varied experiences you've had as a student. Do any of the following situations sound familiar?

- Handling challenging relationships with housemates, in school organizations, or within class teams.
- Deciding what college to attend and which major to pursue.
- Managing multiple tasks like writing a term paper, studying for a major exam, and meeting family/work obligations simultaneously.
- Organizing a study group for a particularly challenging course.
- Choosing between an unpaid internship, volunteer work, and a job.

These examples provide a wealth of material to use in a behavioral interview. Think about the processes that went into resolving each situation and consider how you might have demonstrated some of the following qualities:

- Initiative
- Individual leadership

- Working well in teams
- Cultural awareness
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Decision-making skills
- Problem solving and analytical skills
- Effective time management
- Working under pressure

### **Traditional Interviews vs. Behavioral Interviews**

If you have experience with traditional interviewing, 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 in a past situation.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of “peeling the layers from an onion”).
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details about a specific experience, 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 Approach Behavioral Questions**

#### **Determine what competency the interviewer is evaluating.**

For example, think about how you would describe a time when you were a member of a team or group that had to achieve a goal or solve a problem. What type of team or group was it? What was the team or group trying to do? What was your role? How did you contribute to the team or group? Was the team or group successful?

This question is focusing on teamwork/collaboration. The interviewer wants to know how you work effectively with others outside the formal lines of authority to accomplish a goal or resolve a problem.

Try to use recent examples; this will assist you in providing accurate details.

#### **Determine what situation best demonstrates your skill or ability in that competency.**

Decide upon an experience that will allow you to elaborate in detail on the skill or competency that the interviewer has requested. Focus on one detailed account.

## Identify the actions you took.

Once you've pinpointed a variety of relevant situations, you must learn how to use them effectively in a behavioral interview. One strategy is to use the STAR technique, as outlined below.

### Situation

Describe in detail what the situation was and include any related circumstances. Focus on a specific event or situation. Highlight the actions you took and the skills you used in describing your experience. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.

### Task or Action

Describe the specific actions that you took to affect the situation. Be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did, the tasks accomplished – not the efforts of the team.

### Result

Describe the outcome. Focus on how your actions impacted the final result. Try to make sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you, even if the result was not favorable.

Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. Interviewers are also interested in how you overcame obstacles. Remember to focus on what you learned from your experiences and practice your stories as much as possible.

## Tips for Answering Behavioral Questions

- Give a complete story of an event, including key points and results.
- Be specific about what YOU: Did/Said/Felt/Thought.
- Separate your actions from the actions of others.
- 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.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.
- Ask for clarification if you're unsure of the question.
- Watch and listen for interviewer cues.
- Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level or authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor" could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."