

BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWS

Understanding How to Excel in the Interview

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Behavioral interviewing is a relatively new mode of job interviewing. Employers such as AT&T and Accenture (the former Andersen Consulting) have been using behavioral interviewing for about 15 years and because increasing numbers of employers are using behavior-based methods to screen job candidates, understanding how to excel in this interview environment is becoming a crucial job-hunting skill.

Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10 percent predictive.

BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWS

What is it?

- Behavioral interviewing is a technique used by employers in which the questions asked assist the employer in making predictions about a potential employee's future success based on actual past behaviors, instead of based on responses to hypothetical questions.
- In behavior-based interviews, you are asked to give specific examples of when you demonstrated particular behaviors or skills.
- General answers about behavior are not what the employer is looking for. You must describe in detail a particular event, project, or experience and how you dealt with the situation, and what the outcome was.

BEHAVIOR VS. TRADITIONAL

Behavioral-based interviewing is touted as providing a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions while traditional interview questions ask general questions such as "Tell me about yourself."

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear, even if you are fudging a bit on the truth. Even if you are asked situational questions that start out "How would you handle XYZ situation?" you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know, after all, if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would?

BEHAVIOR VS. TRADITIONAL

In a behavioral interview, however, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. 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.

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Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success.

The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position to include the following:

Critical thinking

Willingness to learn

Self-confidence

Professionalism

Being a self-starter

Willingness to travel

Teamwork

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When responding to behavior-based questions use the following:

- The "S.T.A.R." technique is a good approach; describe the **S**ituation you were in or the **T**ask you needed to accomplish; describe the **A**ction you took, and the **R**esults.
- Be specific, not general or vague.
- Don't describe how you would behave. Describe how you did actually behave. If you later decided you should have behaved differently, explain this. The employer will see that you learned something from the experience.

S.T.A.R. TECHNIQUE

Here is an example of the S.T.A.R. Technique”

Situation (S) or Task (T):

Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, *The Voice*, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Action (A):

I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of *The Voice's* circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Result (R):

We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for bi-weekly ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent [quantities are always good] over the same period last year.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
- Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.
- Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of when you had to show good leadership.

PREPARING FOR BEHAVIOR INTERVIEWS

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half of your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use fairly recent examples. As a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Some interviewers will specifically asks for examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form and/or S.T.A.R.

Review your resume right before the interview. Seeing your achievements will jog your memory.

Because each interviewer is different, there are many types of interviews. Some interviewers are skilled at interviewing; others are not. Some are talkative; others let you do most of the talking. Most interviews, however, will range from open-ended, in which the interviewer asks questions and lets you do most of the talking, to the highly structured, in which the interviewer asks many specific questions following a planned format. Many interviews will fall between these extremes; you should be prepared for any style.



The following are four basic stages that can occur
in a typical interview:

TYPICAL STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW

1. **Introductory stage:** The interviewer will establish rapport and create a relaxed, though businesslike, atmosphere. This is where the interviewer gets the very important first impression of you.
2. **Review of your background and interests:** This usually takes the form of "what," "why," "where," and "when" types of questions. Focus on what you are like, and what you have accomplished, your academic and work background, and your goals. One of the interviewer's objectives is to see if your qualifications match your declared work interests. Give concise but thorough responses to questions.
3. **Matching begins:** Assuming you have the necessary qualifications, the interviewer will begin the process of determining whether the employer's job opening(s) match your interests and qualifications. If there seems to be a match, the interviewer will probably explain job details to see how interested you are in the position.
4. **Conclusion:** In this stage, the interviewer should explain what the next steps are in the hiring process. Be sure you understand them. Promptly provide any additional information requested. There should be ample opportunity for you at this point to ask any questions you have.

CONTACT THE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

to schedule an appointment for a mock interview, discuss career options, or get assistance in writing your cover letter and resume, and other career-related matters.

Monday-Friday

9:00am – 5:30pm

SBE, Suite 230

672-1205

www.uncfsu.edu/CareerServ/

***References:**

Hansen, Katharine, *Behavioral Interviewing Strategies for Job-Seekers*, www.quintcareers.com/behavioral_interviewing.html

Interviewing for Jobs and Internships, www.cclc.umn.edu/handouts/Behavior_Based_Interviewing.pdf