

Overview of Behavioral Interviews

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What exactly is a behavioral interview? It's a job interview that focuses on questions about how the candidate has behaved in the past in specific work situations.

Most job interviews include at least some behavioral interview questions. By asking you about your past behavior, hiring managers try to get a sense of how you might respond in similar circumstances in the future.

Behavioral interview questions are probing questions about your background. How and when have you used the skills that they have deemed most important for the job in question? How have you responded to challenges similar to those you would likely face in the new role? Behavioral questions often ask you to get into very specific detail.

Behavioral Interview Questions: Examples

- *Tell me about a time you took responsibility for a task outside of your job description.*
- *How have you previously used your analytic skills to determine a solution to a problem?*
- *Describe a challenging goal that you set and explain how it was achieved.*
- *Tell me about a time that you had to sell an idea to senior management.*

- *Describe a situation in which you had to work under pressure. How did you handle the stress?*
- *Have you ever had to work with a difficult manager or coworker? How did you respond?*
- *Tell me about a mistake that you made. How did you address it?*

Getting Prepared for a Behavioral Interview

Before any job interview, you should take the time to practice responses to behavioral interview questions tied to the top themes in the job description. If a job description stresses qualities such as *"organized"* and *"detail-oriented,"* you can bet that you will be asked about past experiences managing time, projects, and details.

Likewise, if the job description is all about *"people skills,"* you're sure to be quizzed about your approaches to managing people, handling conflicts, and working on a team.

To prepare for a behavioral interview, read the job description carefully and make a list of the **top 5-8 qualifications** and/or skills required. For each of these, brainstorm to come up with stories and examples that illustrate your strengths and accomplishments.

The STAR (or PAR) Approach to Behavioral Questions

Use the STAR approach in constructing these stories. *ST* is for Situation/Task. *A* is for Approach/Action. *R* is for Resolution/Results. Briefly describe the problem or situation, then talk about your approach to solving/addressing it, and end with a description of the positive resolution.

Take the time to practice these stories with a friend or in the mirror. Get comfortable talking about your past behavior in a way that highlights your abilities. This is no time to be modest. If you're shy, practice is even more important. With enough repetition, you'll be able to sing your own praises in a natural way that won't come across as bragging.

During the Behavioral Interview

If you do your homework, you'll be ready when faced with a behavioral question during the interview. If you get a question that stumps you, it's okay to pause and collect your thoughts. Ask for clarification if you're not sure what the interviewer is looking for -- or if you need another moment to think.

There is no one "right" answer to a behavioral interview question. The interviewer wants to learn more about you, your experience, and how you approach work. This will allow her to see if you're a good match for the job opportunity.

A winning behavioral interview is one in which you are able to show a history of performance and results in the key responsibility areas for the job that you want. Just don't forget to show a little of your personality, too. Employers want to hire the best

person for the job, but they also want to hire someone that will be pleasant to work with. Your behavioral interview answers can help you give the interviewer a sense of what it would be like to work with you.