

# Behavioral Interview Questions And Answers 101 (+ Free PDF)

*By Mike Simpson*



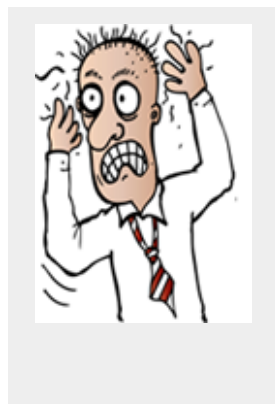
Imagine you're sitting on a black folding chair in the middle of the hiring manager's office at your very next job interview.

You want this job. Bad.

You're eye to eye with the hiring manager...

The hiring manager takes a long pause and after what seems like an eternity finally leans forward and says:

***"Tell me about a time when a group project you were working on failed...."***



Uh oh. One of the dreaded **behavioral interview questions**.

So, considering your future career aspirations may hinge on your answer...

What do you say?

Do you have a **"success story"** that highlights the exact qualities that particular company is looking for in an employee, and are you ready to talk about it smoothly?

This guy has been trying to prepare for behavioral questions (he clearly hasn't read this post...)

Or are you sitting there dry-mouthed with a confused and rather silly look on your face as you try and come up with a stall tactic?

Don't worry if you fell into the "confused and rather silly" camp because this article is going to demystify behavioral interviews and hand you a clear blueprint or plan for coming up with fantastic answers that will wow the hiring manager and leave your competition in your dust.

You are going to get actionable stuff that you can immediately apply in your next interview. No wishy washy info here.

Start by downloading our "**Behavioral Interview Questions PDF Checklist**" that gives tips on how to [answer 25 common behavioral questions](#) **[CLICK HERE TO GET THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW CHECKLIST](#)**

Behavioral questions definitely take a little practice to get the hang of, but this article is going to take you step by step through the process of getting prepared.

There are various components to a behavioral question that we we need to break down piece by piece...

**Ok let's get cracking...**

## What The Heck Are Behavioral Interview Questions Anyway?



In case you aren't completely clear on what exactly behavioral questions are, here's an explanation.

**A behavioral question (also known as STAR Interview Questions or behavior-based interview questions) is a question that aims at learning about your past “behaviors” in specific work situations.**

How you have “behaved” in certain situations in the past will give them clues on how you’ll behave in those same situations when working for them in the future.

Behavioral questions can be asked at any time, but are often asked as part of a [second interview](#).

Why do hiring managers insist on asking behavioral questions? (*Don't they know job interviews are hard enough??*)

Hiring managers ask behavioral questions for a very specific reason.

They are trying to see if you possess specific qualities that they need for the particular position you are interviewing for.

Remember, as Jeff and I always say: **“It’s not about you, It’s about them”**

In other words, if they are looking for someone with good leadership qualities, they may ask you a behavioral question to see if your past behaviors demonstrate leadership.

An example of a behavioral question that is looking for you to demonstrate leadership qualities could be:

**“Tell me about a time when you took the lead on a difficult project?”**

So that begs the question, how can you demonstrate to the hiring manager that you can be a great leader?

The answer is: **With Success Stories**

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# Why You Need “Success Stories” To Give Fantastic Answers To Behavioral Questions

**A success story is a short story from your past that highlights a specific “quality” or “competency” that you possess.**

Usually a success story revolves around a past work experience. However, for recent grads or those with little work experience a Success Story can be taken from other events in your life such as school clubs, athletic teams, volunteer work etc... The point is it must highlight the quality they are looking for.

For example, let's go back to our leadership question: ***“Tell me about a time when you took the lead on a difficult project?”***

In order to answer this well you obviously need to relate a success story from your past that shows you demonstrating leadership qualities.

The key is, you need to be prepared with your success story **BEFORE** you find yourself sitting on the hot seat faced with this question.

*(Sitting there, humming and hawing awkwardly while you try and come with something is a surefire way for you to NOT get the job.)*

Instead, you need to effortlessly pull out a success story that is perfect for the situation.

Here is an example of Success Story that is both appropriate for the leadership question above and based on some of my own past experience. In this case, I was working at a car dealership as a service advisor (a nice way of saying I was there to help you fix your car and sell you overpriced floor mats):

"I volunteered for (and was nominated the head of) a committee of 4 people tasked with investigating poor customer reviews. I analyzed reviews and discovered that customer wait times were the largest contributor to negative reviews. I then lead brainstorming situations with my team to find a solution. This solution was a change in workflow for mechanics. After implementing my suggestion, wait times dropped 18%."

Now don't forget, on its own this is not an answer to a behavioral interview question, but merely a success story to reference in your interview answer. You will want to frame your answer around this success story (more about this coming up below).

I know what you're thinking:

***"So Mike, what you're telling me is that I have to have hundreds of these success stories ready and waiting to tackle any behavioral question they could throw at me!?? Sounds...terrible."***

Don't worry, there's a shortcut and a trick that will let you sidestep all that work and we will get into it in the next section.

## How To Pick The Right Success Stories

Instead of slogging through trying to come up with a success story for every possible behavioral questions there are 2 things you can do instead.

1. **Only prepare success stories for the most common categories of behavioral questions.**
2. **Do some cutting edge company research in order to find out what specific qualities your company is looking for and then craft a few success stories that highlight those specific qualities.**

## **Time Saving Tactic 1**

First I want to give you the 5 categories of common behavioral questions.

The fact is, there are certain types of behavioral questions that are asked more often than others. By knowing these common types, you can prepare a success story to address each category.

Let's take a look at the common behavior based question categories:

- 1. Teamwork Oriented**
- 2. Problem Solving**
- 3. Initiative/Leadership**
- 4. Interpersonal Skills**
- 5. Challenge/Stress/Pressure**

If you prepare a success story to cover each these 5 categories then you will be covering your bases pretty well and be saving yourself a lot of time in preparation.

You just need to be able tweak your success story to whatever question comes down the pipe.

For example, here's another example (from my past) of a good success story that can be used when answering a problem solving type behavior based question. In this case, I was working for a pro sports team as a Season Ticket Sales Representative:

"Facing low sales numbers for full season ticket packages and the possibility of many empty seats for the upcoming season, I developed, created and spearheaded the implementation of a new sales strategy, which allowed for the sale of smaller "game

packs” as opposed to only “full season” ticket packages. This strategy directly increased overall sales by 44%.”

Your task is to come up with one good success story for each of the common behavioral categories. You can look to the “problem solving” example above for inspiration.

### **Time Saving Tactic 2**

The next thing you’ll want to do, is mine your job description to find qualities you know the company is looking for.

Grab the job description and go through it with a fine toothed comb and tease out any qualities that the company is highlighting and jot them down.

Do they bring up “collaboration” as a requisite competency for the position?

How about “problem solving”?

You’ll quickly notice that most job descriptions you come across will very clearly state the qualities the company is looking for in their “Perfect Candidate”.

So go ahead, grab the job description and do some detective work!

Ok, done?

Great! Now that you have a list of these qualities, you now know the types of behavioral questions you are most likely going to be asked and can craft your success stories accordingly!

Ok, now that you have your success stories locked down it’s time we go through some actual examples of behavioral questions.

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## Common Behavioral Interview Questions

- "Describe a Situation Where You Disagreed With a Supervisor."
- "Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work."
- "Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem."
- "Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts."
- "Do you feel you work well under pressure? If so, describe a time when you have done so..."
- "Give me an example of a time when you motivated others."
- "Tell me about a time where you had to delegate tasks during a project"
- "Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead."
- "Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem."
- "Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment."



Can you see how these questions are all trying to find out how you behaved in the past in order to predict how you will behave in the future?

So now that you know that you have to use success stories and you have an idea of what a behavioral question looks like, how the heck to you actually answer them??

**NOTE:** This article focuses on Behavioral Interview Questions. For more information on how to answer traditional interview questions, please check out our other in-depth article "[Job Interview Questions and Answers 101.](#)" For information on how to answer situational interview questions, you can check out our article "[Situational Interview Questions and Answers](#)"

## Why You Need To Use The S.T.A.R. Method To Craft Your Behavioral Answers

Now that you know the importance of having your success stories planned out, you now need to understand how to use them in your interview answers.

The best way to organize your behavioral answers is to use [the S.T.A.R. method](#) (which is why behavioral interview questions are often referred to as STAR Interview Questions).

The STAR interview method gives you a simple framework to use when crafting your answers.

Here's what STAR stands for:

- 1. Situation:** Open with a brief description of the Situation and context of the success story (who, what, where, when, how).
- 2. Task:** Explain the Task you had to complete highlighting any specific challenges or constraint (eg deadlines, costs, other issues).
- 3. Action:** Describe the specific Actions that you took to complete the task. These should highlight desirable traits without needing to state them (initiative, intelligence, dedication, leadership, understanding, etc.)
- 4. Result:** Close with the result of your efforts. Include figures to quantify the result if possible.

#### MIKE'S TIP

Your success story should be between 1 and 3 minutes. No more!

## How To Use The S.T.A.R. Method

Now let's bring everything we've gone over together and come up with a fantastic behavioral answer that will knock the hiring managers socks off!

Ok let's go back to the leadership question we were dealing with earlier in this article:

***“Tell me about a time when you took the lead on a difficult project?”***

I'm going to include the Success Story I have and use the [STAR method](#) to deliver a succinct, yet detailed answer that highlights the fact that I can bring good leadership qualities to the table.

Take a look at my answer:

A few years back I was working as a Service Advisor at car dealership. One morning in our department staff meeting the Service Manager announced that we had been receiving an unacceptable amount of negative reviews for the service we had been

providing our customers. His solution was to create a committee that would analyze the situation and put forth actionable improvements, and for this he asked for volunteers.

I had been looking for an opportunity to show that I was capable of taking on more responsibility, and being a person who enjoys working in group situations, I was the first to volunteer. My Service Manager was quick to make me the leader of the committee, which put me in the position of the leader of a group of 4 other people who were tasked to come up with a solution.

Over the next three weeks we analyzed each of the customer services reports and discovered that the vast majority of negative reviews were a result of lengthy wait times for customers. Knowing that we had to come up with a solution to decrease the amount of time our customers were left waiting, I then lead brainstorming sessions to find a way to fix the problem. We zoned in on changing the way our mechanics worked on each work order.

After implementing my suggestion, mechanics were able to focus mainly on their specializations, which meant they worked faster and more efficiently, which translated to wait times dropping by 18%. This was a situation that required me to manage 4 people and find a solution that created a positive outcome and solved a critical issue, which I believe I was able to do.

**Ok now take a look at the answer in a new way, where I breakdown exactly whats going on in the answer so you can see exactly how the answer is crafted:**

**S**

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**T**

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**S**ituation **T**ask **A**ction **R**esult

 → Leadership Quality

So hopefully that little graphic Jeff cooked up, makes it clear how the success story, the leadership quality and the STAR method all work together in a well crafted answer.

### MIKE'S TIP

Note the specificity of the Result in the example answer: "wait times dropped by 18%." It's always a great idea to demonstrate a clear and numbered result in your answer.

If you want to get some more examples of other behavioral interview questions, download our "Behavioral Interview Questions PDF Checklist" that gives tips on how to answer 25 common behavioral questions [CLICK HERE TO GET THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW](#)

## A Word Of Warning

You're almost ready to head off and crush your behavioral interview, but first I want to give you a little word of warning.

Often when being asked a behavioral question, the hiring manager will give you a clue as to what quality he's looking for.

For example, if he or she asks you to "Tell them about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem..." then it's pretty clear that the quality they're looking for is: problem solving.

Makes sense right?

But as Mark Murphy explains in his illuminating article on Forbes ["The Hidden Flaw In Behavioral Interview Questions"](#), hiring managers may soon be shifting away from this type of "leading" question and moving towards a more open ended behavioral question that aims to be more challenging to the average interviewee.

Take a look at this excerpt from Murphy's article (geared towards employers):

*"These [behavioral] questions give away the right answers; cuing candidates to share success stories and avoid examples of failure. But how are interviewers supposed to tell good from bad candidates if everyone shares only success stories? Wouldn't you rather change the question so that candidates feel free to tell you about all the times they couldn't balance competing priorities? Or failed to persuade people? Or couldn't adapt to a difficult situation?"*

So if hiring managers take Mr. Murphy's advice (and they probably should, so you need to be ready...) a more traditional behavioral question goes from something like: ""Tell me about a time when you were bored on the job and what you did to make the job more interesting." to ""Could you tell me about a time when you were bored on the job?"...

Notice how the first question gives away exactly what the hiring manager is looking for whereas question #2 leaves things a lot more open ended and gives the interviewee ample opportunity to put his or her foot in their mouth!

So, what do you do if you're faced with one of Mr. Murphy's trickier, open ended behavioral questions?

Simple, you use **tactic #2** from earlier on in this article.

**You mine the job description and find out exactly what qualities the company is looking for in their perfect candidate and you craft your success stories accordingly.**

This way, even if you get an open ended question you will be ready to answer with a success story that highlights a quality you KNOW they are looking for.

Trust me this works amazingly well. This approach really turned things around for me in my own interviews and will do the same for you.

Ok so in summary you now know:

- What **behavioral questions** are and **why** hiring managers ask them.

- You also know that there are **specific qualities** or **behaviors** you have to show the hiring manager you possess through your well crafted answer.
- You know you need **Success Stories** and you know how to pick them.
- You know the common behavioral interview question categories.
  - You know that you need to **do some digging to find out exactly what qualities your specific company is looking fo**
- You also now know what the **STAR method** is and how to use it to craft a fantastic answer.

Now you should really be ready to tackle any behavioral question that comes your way.

Please be kind and rate this post 😊

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To make sure you're **110% prepared** we've prepared a cool **PDF checklist that you should download...**

## **FREE: Behavioral Interview Questions PDF Checklist**

Ok the next thing you should do is download our handy "**Behavioral Interview Questions Checklist PDF**".

In it you'll get **25 common behavioral questions** along with **tips on how to answer them** and the **traps you need to avoid....**

All in a beautifully designed pdf Jeff spent hours working on. ---- He made me put that in 😊

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