

## **BEP 343 – 2nd Round Interviews 2: Behavioral Interviews**

Hello and welcome back to Business English Pod. My name's Edwin, and I'll be your host for today's lesson on second round interviews in English.

You may know all about the basic English job *interview* questions. And you might be comfortable talking about your basic qualifications and experience. But most companies don't stop the selection process after one round of interviews. They create a shortlist and invite a few outstanding candidates back for a second interview.

In many cases, that second interview is what we call a behavioral interview. Interviewers will ask questions about how you acted or reacted to challenges in past work, and how you dealt with or adapted to different situations. In this way, they can find out whether you have the right attitude, approach, and abilities for the job.

The behavioral interview is a special opportunity to demonstrate soft skills, such as leadership, or how you take a principled approach to problems. You might also want to show that you can remain calm in conflict. In many cases, the STAR approach can help shape your responses. This is when you describe four things: the situation, the task, the action, and the result. And in this kind of English interview, you have to be careful, because some interviewers will try to give you leading questions to get you to reveal mistakes or problems.

In today's dialog, we'll hear Kat, who is applying for a job with a private healthcare company. She is being interviewed by Denise. Denise is asking Kat some tough behavioral questions, and Kat is doing a good job of demonstrating some important soft skills.

As you listen to the dialog, try to answer the following questions:

1. What example does Kat give of how she showed leadership and went above and beyond?
2. What situation does Kat describe in response to a question about an unpopular decision?
3. What attitude or attribute does Kat demonstrate when describing a situation of conflict?

## **Vocabulary**

**To go above and beyond:** to do something extra that you are not required to do; "I'm happy to present this service award to Karl, who has gone above and beyond his job duties for the past 25 years."

**Beyond the call of duty:** more or better than what is expected or required; "I'm not asking you to go beyond the call of duty to take care of your clients Ryan. Just check in regularly."

**To strive:** to make great efforts; "At Filmore Electronics we strive to provide excellent products backed by excellent service."

**Health provider:** a company that provides medical services; "A recent report outlines how health providers throughout the U.S. are having difficulty finding enough qualified nurses."

**To apply something:** to use a method, law, or approach; "The agile approach to software development is now being applied outside the programming world in other companies."

**Down with:** not at work due to a disease or injury; "Productivity has decreased since so many of our staff have been down with the flu."

**Pelvis:** the large bones that connect your upper body to your legs; "A broken pelvis is a common – and very serious – injury for elderly people who suffer falls."

**On your own time:** outside work hours; "Listen Grant, I don't care what you do on your own time, but here at work we have a no-Facebook policy."

**Funder:** a person or organization that gives money to a project or program; "The state government has decided to come in as a funder on the lakeside real estate development."

**To pull out:** to stop being involved in an activity; "If Canada doesn't agree to the Americans' terms for a new trade deal, Trump says they'll pull out of the agreement."

**Launch:** the official start of a project or sale of a new product; "I'm hoping that the new website will be ready for a big launch in October."

**Top-notch:** very high quality; "I definitely recommend Daikon Delivery. They've consistently proven that they're a top-notch courier service."

**Shortcut:** an easier or shorter way of doing something; "Instead of adding up all those numbers manually, I can teach you a shortcut in Excel."

**To have your nose out of joint:** to be upset or annoyed; "Looks like Tim has his nose out of joint because Wayne didn't approve his summer vacation request."

**To do something halfway:** to make minimal effort or to do unsatisfactory work; "I don't want Joan on this app project because she's so busy she ends up doing everything halfway."

**To cut corners:** to not do a job perfectly or thoroughly, often to save time or money; "Looks like the developer cut corners on building materials, because things are already falling apart."

**Disciplined approach:** a careful and safe approach; "At Valex Enterprises, we take a disciplined approach to growth, looking for safe investments and long-term acquisitions."

**Circumstantial:** depending on the situation; "Sometimes I'm strict with my employees and sometimes I'm pretty relaxed. It's really circumstantial."

**To pitch:** to persuade someone to buy, support, or accept something; "At the staff meeting I pitched an idea for a new training program, but I don't think anybody liked it."

**To uphold:** to support something by what you say or do; "We weren't happy with the safety inspector's decision, but after further review, his manager decided to uphold it."

**Homecare:** medical help or care delivered in the patient's home; "Homecare is a great way both for national medical systems to save money and for the elderly to maintain independence."

**To storm into:** to enter a place quickly because you are upset; "I knew that as soon as he got my email with the announcement of cutbacks, Randall would storm into my office to complain."

**Riled up:** very excited or upset; "Okay everyone, it seems like a lot of people are riled up about this news, so let's just take a break and resume the meeting in 15 minutes."

**To rationalize:** to explain reasons for something, especially something that doesn't seem reasonable; "Sure Bob, you can rationalize the decision to cancel the contract all you want, but it's still a bad idea."

## **Dialog**

**Denise:** Now... I have another question here about your time with Fortune Health... I'd like you to tell me about a time when you had to **go above and beyond**... I mean **beyond the call of duty**?

**Kat:** Above and beyond? Well, I think I've gone above and beyond to develop what I call a "culture of care" among my team. I mean, we **strive** to deliver great care as **health providers**. But that philosophy has to be **applied** internally as well...

**Denise:** Okay, so...

**Kat:** So, as an example, when one of our nurses was **down with** a broken **pelvis**, I organized a couple of hospital visits. I took some of our other staff out on the weekend to see her. She doesn't have a lot of family around. So I felt it was our job – and *my* job – to make sure she felt supported.

**Denise:** I see. And this was **on your own time**?

**Kat:** Yeah... it wasn't anything major but I think a little effort had a big impact.

**Denise:** Okay, now another situation for you. A bit different. Can you tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision?

**Kat:** Sure... Okay, so last year we had a situation where a **funder pulled out** just before **launch**. My job was to make sure that project was **top-notch**. No **shortcuts**. And so I decided to postpone the launch by three months. You know, there were a few **noses out of joint**... people who had worked really hard... but I had to tell them that we weren't going to **do it halfway**. We had to be ready. And to be excellent - not just good enough and on time.

**Denise:** Right... so you didn't want to **cut corners**. And... are you generally uncomfortable with things like... cost-cutting, or **disciplined approaches** to budgeting?

**Kat:** No, not at all. It's all **circumstantial** really. On that particular project, we were guided very deliberately by concerns for quality. That's the idea we **pitched** to our funders, *and* to the public. And I had a duty to **uphold** that. Even if some people didn't like the decision.

**Denise:** All right then, a bit related, but I'd like to look at different situation, or circumstance... give me a recent example of how you dealt with an upset co-worker or member of staff?

**Kat:** Okay, well last week I had one of our **homecare** nurses **storm into** my office, yelling at me about her schedule. Very unhappy. Now... this is someone with a history of conflict. She can get pretty **riled up**. So... first I invited her to sit down. Not across from my desk, but at a smaller table in my office. More casual. And then I just listened. I didn't **rationalize**... at first, anyway... or tell her to calm down. And after a time, she lowered her voice and we started to work things out...

## Debrief

Now let's go through the dialog again and look at the language and techniques Kat uses during her interview.

**Denise:** Now... I have another question here about your time with Fortune Health... I'd like you to tell me about a time when you had to **go above and beyond**... I mean **beyond the call of duty**...

When you "go above and beyond the call of duty," you do something extra, or something that you're not *required* to do. Let's hear how Kat responds to this question.

**Kat:** Above and beyond? Well, I think I've gone above and beyond to develop what I call a "culture of care" among my team. I mean, we **strive** to deliver great care as **health providers**. But that philosophy has to be **applied** internally as well...

Kat starts out speaking fairly generally. That is, she hasn't described a specific situation yet, but rather she is describing her *approach* to a situation. In this case, her approach is one based on the need to take care of people on her team.

It's a great idea if you can give the rationale or reasons for your actions in a situation. And those reasons are related to the principles that you think are important. Showing a principled approach tells an interviewer that you think carefully about how to respond to situations or events. Let's try some more ways of showing a principled approach.

- Whatever the solution, it had to be one that everyone could believe in.
- Good communication is a top priority, so everything else flows from that.
- I needed to make a decision that was both fair and effective.
- I thought the best course of action would have to fit with our strategic plan.

Kat has explained her approach, but she still hasn't given the situation. Let's listen.

**Denise:** Okay, so...

**Kat:** So, as an example, when one of our nurses was **down with** a broken **pelvis**, I organized a couple of hospital visits. I took some of our other staff out on the weekend to see her. She doesn't have a lot of family around. So I felt it was our job – and *my* job – to make sure she felt supported.

Kat is now giving an example of how she showed care for one of her nurses. This is an example of "going above and beyond" that Denise asked for. Kat has chosen a good example, because it gives her a chance to show another important attribute: leadership.

Kat could have explained an individual situation where she did something extra, but instead she's showing how she organized other people to go and visit the injured nurse. So, your success in a behavioral situation depends on talking about situations that allow you to demonstrate key attributes.

How else can we show leadership in a behavioral interview? Let's practice a few more examples.

- There was a lot of confusion, so I arranged a conference call to discuss the problem.
- I realized that this person needed some guidance and help to do his job well.
- I really felt that it was my job to come up with ways of increasing sales.
- Rather than seeing someone get laid off, I said "let's find another way to cut costs."

Now back to the dialog, as Denise moves on to another question.

**Denise:** I see. And this was **on your own time**?

**Kat:** Yeah... it wasn't anything major but I think a little effort had a big impact.

**Denise:** Okay, now another situation for you. A bit different. Can you tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision?

As you can hear, behavioral interviews can include some pretty tough questions. And once again, it's important that you explain clearly the reasons for your actions and the context. Let's hear how Kat does this.

**Kat:** Sure... Okay, so last year we had a situation where a **funder pulled out** just before **launch**. My job was to make sure that project was **top-notch**. No **shortcuts**. And so I decided to postpone the launch by three months. You know, there were a few **noses out of joint**... people who had worked really hard... but I had to tell them that we weren't going to **do it halfway**. We had to be ready. And to be excellent - not just good enough and on time.

Kat is using what we call a STAR approach to this question. First she describes the *situation*, which is that a funder decided not to provide money for a project. Then she describes her *task*, which was to make sure the project was excellent, or "top-notch." Next, she describes her *action*, which was to postpone the launch of the project. And finally she mentioned the *results*, or what happened because of her actions. So we have: situation, task, action, result, or STAR.

The STAR approach helps you give a complete picture of the situation so the interviewer can see why you behaved in a certain way. Especially with questions about challenges, you want to make sure the interviewer has a complete picture.

Let's go through some more ways of using the STAR approach. First, we'll try a couple of examples of explaining the situation and task, and then a couple on action and results.

- Customers were complaining, and I had to find a way to make them happy...
- So there were lots of ideas, but my job was to choose the best course of action...
- ...I eliminated the weekly report, and that freed up three hours a week for other work.
- ...so I hired an admin assistant, and the account managers were much happier.

In her last response, Kat mentioned that she didn't want to "do it halfway," or to do less than originally planned. Denise picks up on this idea for her next question.

**Denise:** Right... so you didn't want to **cut corners**. And... are you generally uncomfortable with things like... cost-cutting, or **disciplined approaches** to budgeting?

Denise might be worried that Kat's unwillingness to do things halfway might mean she isn't careful with money. So she asks Kat if she's uncomfortable with efforts to save money or be efficient. It's a tricky question, because if you don't think carefully, your immediate reaction might be to just say yes. But you should be able to resist a leading question like this.

**Kat:** No, not at all. It's all **circumstantial** really.

Kat doesn't agree with Denise's assumption. She states very clearly that she's *not* uncomfortable with careful budgeting. In fact, she says that it's "circumstantial," which means it depends on the situation.

In this way, Kat has resisted Denise's leading question. She doesn't just agree with what sounds like a logical statement. She's confident enough to say "no" and to explain herself.

How about practicing a few more examples of resisting a leading question?

- No, in fact I love working on group projects.
- Definitely not. I think it's always better to be totally honest about these things.
- Actually, I really don't think so. I did everything I could to avoid the problem.
- No. That's simply not the way I like to approach conflict.

Let's get back to the interview, as Kat finishes her explanation and Denise moves on to another behavioral question.

**Kat:** On that particular project, we were guided very deliberately by concerns for quality. That's the idea we **pitched** to our funders, *and* to the public. And I had a duty to **uphold** that. Even if some people didn't like the decision.

**Denise:** All right then, a bit related, but I'd like to look at different situation, or circumstance... give me a recent example of how you dealt with an upset co-worker or member of staff?

Remember, every question is an opportunity to show how you approach situations. And what approach does this kind of situation call for? Let's listen.

**Kat:** Okay, well last week I had one of our **homecare** nurses **storm into** my office, yelling at me about her schedule. Very unhappy. Now... this is someone with a history of conflict. She can get pretty **riled up**. So... first I invited her to sit down. Not across from my desk, but at a smaller table in my office. More casual. And then I just listened. I didn't **rationalize**... at first, anyway... or tell her to calm down. And after a time, she lowered her voice and we started to work things out...

Once again, Kat is describing the situation, what she did, and the result. In this case, an angry – or “riled up” – nurse came into her office and started shouting about the schedule. Kat explains how she remained calm. She didn’t get upset, but rather sat down for a conversation and listened carefully. And this approach appears to have worked, because the employee eventually lowered her voice.

Some of the biggest workplace challenges are related to conflict between people. And if you can demonstrate that you have dealt with such situations calmly, you’ll be considered a good candidate for any job. So let’s run through some more examples of demonstrating calm in a conflict.

- First, I asked everyone to stop shouting and take a deep breath.
- I listened carefully for several minutes, then gently interrupted him.
- While everyone was arguing, I went to the whiteboard and started writing down key ideas.
- I didn’t show how angry I was, but just invited him into my office for a chat.

Kat has used Denise’s questions to demonstrate some really important qualities. And she’s explained her actions very clearly, providing the right amount of context for Denise to understand the situations.

Now let’s practice some of the language we learned in today’s lesson. Imagine you are interviewing for a management position. You’ll hear a cue from the interviewer, then I’ll give you a suggestion for what you can say in response. We’ll guide you through each step in the practice and provide an example answer for each response.

Ready? Let’s give it a go.

**Cue 1:** So, why did you decide not to go ahead with the project?

Start by saying that you didn’t have enough staff to do an excellent job.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 2:** But weren’t you worried about meeting your monthly revenue targets?

Now say yes, but that you also have to think about long-term sustainability.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 3:** Okay, now tell me about another time you had to make a difficult decision.

Next, say that there was a personality conflict with members of your last team.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 4:** Right, that’s a fairly common situation so what did you do?

Now say that you reassigned one member to another project and the whole team improved.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Answer 1:** Well, we didn't really have enough staff to do an excellent job.

**Answer 2:** Yes, but I also have a duty to think about long-term sustainability.

**Answer 3:** Well, there was a personality conflict with members of my last team.

**Answer 4:** I reassigned one member to another project, and the whole team improved.

Now let's practice some of the vocabulary we've covered in this lesson. In a moment, you'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a beep. Repeat each sentence, *including* the missing word.

For example, if you hear:

**Example Cue:** So what kind of things do you like to do in your own <beep>?

You can say:

**Example Answer:** So what kind of things do you like to do in your own **time**?

After each response, we'll provide the correct answer. Let's begin.

**Cue 1:** Jack deserves the promotion because he always goes above and <beep>.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 2:** This is a very important client so we can't cut any <beep>.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 3:** Dave's nose was really out of <beep> about having to work on Saturday.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cue 4:** At Roundtree, we <beep> to provide the best service at the best prices.

**Answer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Answer 1:** Jack deserves the promotion because he always goes above and **beyond**.

**Answer 2:** This is a very important client so we can't cut any **corners**.

**Answer 3:** Dave's nose was really out of **joint** about having to work on Saturday.

**Answer 4:** At Roundtree, we **strive** to provide the best service at the best prices.

We've reached the end of this lesson, the second in our series on second round interviews. We've learned how to demonstrate a principled approach, leadership abilities, and calm in conflict. We've also looked at the STAR approach to behavioral questions and how to confidently resist leading questions.

Thanks for listening and see you again soon!

## Language Review

### A. Review Quiz

For each question, you must choose the sentence that best fulfills the given language function or purpose.

1. Which of the following demonstrates showing a principled approach when describing a past work situation?
  - a) I really wanted to find a way for everyone to cooperate toward a solution.
  - b) My boss told me quite clearly that we needed to save money.
  - c) I don't think I had any choice but to say "yes" to the project.
2. How could you show leadership during a behavioral interview?
  - a) The situation was so bad that I seriously considered leaving to start my own company.
  - b) I really felt that our managers should have taken a stronger position on the issue.
  - c) I tried to put a stop to all the gossip and rumors by getting everyone together in one room to work through the problem.
3. Which of the following is the final step in a STAR approach to a behavioral question?
  - a) I decided to eliminate a few unnecessary features.
  - b) It was my job to make sure we were spending our money wisely.
  - c) We managed to complete the project under budget.
4. How could you confidently resist a leading question?
  - a) No, I don't think so. In fact, I love working with large diverse teams.
  - b) Well, it could be that way, but I don't really think so.
  - c) I guess I am a little bit hesitant to deal with conflict.
5. Which answer demonstrates calm during conflict?
  - a) Before he could say too much, I told Matt really clearly that he could leave if he didn't like the situation.
  - b) I didn't respond, but rather just let Russell say all the difficult things he had to say.
  - c) To be honest, I was shaking and really didn't know what to do.

## B. Vocabulary and Idioms

Fill in the blanks with words from the box below. Be sure to put any verbs in the right tense.

**joint  
time**

**pitch  
strive**

**cut  
beyond**

1. Dan, I think your idea is really amazing, and you should try \_\_\_\_\_ it to some investors.
2. I admit we had to \_\_\_\_\_ a few corners to get the report done on time, but I don't think anyone noticed.
3. I've been going above and \_\_\_\_\_ for this company for a long time and I don't feel anyone's ever acknowledged it.
4. If Linda has her nose out of \_\_\_\_\_ about not getting the promotion, why don't you sit her down and help her understand why?
5. I work as a programmer with Shine Systems during the day, but on my own \_\_\_\_\_ I'm developing a new type of solar panel.
6. As we \_\_\_\_\_ for greater efficiency, we've reduced the number of unnecessary meetings and phone calls.

## Study Strategy

The STAR approach to behavioral questions can be very useful in your second round interview. Remember, STAR stands for situation – task – action – and result. That is, you describe the situation then state what your job or task is within that situation. Then you describe the action or decision you took and what happened as a result.

Start by thinking of several work situations where you played a key role. It could be crisis situations, times when you had to make an important decision, or opportunities to show leadership. Make a few notes about the situation, as well as the task, action, and result.

Now, with a colleague or friend, imagine you are having a second-round job interview. Your partner can start by asking you about a time when you had to make an important decision. Choose one of the situations you listed, then describe the situation, task, action and result. Try to make it clear to your "interviewer" what quality you think you demonstrated in that situation. Repeat this with other situations on your list. When you're done, switch roles and let your partner try.

## **Answers**

### **Listening Questions**

1. Kat demonstrates leadership by describing how she organized people to visit an injured staff member.
2. Kat talks about her decision to postpone the launch of a new project.
3. Kat demonstrates calm during a situation involving conflict.

### **A. Review Quiz**

1. a; 2. c; 3. c; 4. a; 5. b

### **B. Vocabulary and Idioms**

1. Dan, I think your idea is really amazing, and you should try **pitching** it to some investors.
2. I admit we had to **cut** a few corners to get the report done on time, but I don't think anyone noticed.
3. I've been going above and **beyond** for this company for a long time and I don't feel anyone's ever acknowledged it.
4. If Linda has her nose out of **joint** about not getting the promotion, why don't you sit her down and help her understand why?
5. I work as a programmer with Shine Systems during the day, but on my own **time** I'm developing a new type of solar panel.
6. As we **strive** for greater efficiency, we've reduced the number of unnecessary meetings and phone calls.