# Tips for answering few tricky behavioural interview questions

These questions are very commonly asked in HR/behaviourial/managerial rounds of companies.

The reality is - in such rounds, it is important to sound **diplomatic** and **politically correct**.
**Yes, it might sound like faking at times**, but that is precisely what is needed.

As candidates, we definitely need to appear diplomatic and mature - specially for senior positions (say 5+ years of experience). In these rounds, these soft skills matter way more than your stellar coding rounds or design rounds.

**0. The MOST IMPORTANT POINT - Resume DrillDown** - Know your **resume** inside out. **Each and every word written in your resume** can be questioned, it can be about your technical skills, it can be about your hobbies or some award won by you. Be very very sure about everything which you have written in your resume.

Even a HR person may ask question about some fancy technical term(s) mentioned in your skill set. You need to be ready to explain technical terms at a high level in 2-3 sentences. And do not under-estimate the HR - I have personally known people working in HR who have a background in Computer Science, and they are equally capable to grill you technically as well.

**1. Why do you want to quit your current job ?**

Always frame the answer around things like - not learning anything new as product is in a saturated state, and unable to switch teams due to internal policies. NEVER EVER talk about bad boss, politics etc - it will backfire bigtime.
We can also talk about your interest in the technology on which the company (who is interviewing you) is working on.

In case your current company is recently acquired by another bigger company, then you can always talk diplomatically about uncertainity in the environment in your company, several key people leaving after acquisition, product being discontinued or put in maintenance mode etc.

**2. Why do you want to join us ?**

This is a similar question to first one. Only difference is - for this question - we need to be able to talk about 1-2 core products created by that company, the tech stack, and being able to express our interest in the same. A sample answer maybe - *I came to know about your company because of product X, and I found it a very interesting concept*.
I would love to get an opportunity to learn new things by working on this product. Also, use this opportunity to try to get insights into any new features planned for the product in next version.

Expressing interest in their technology is 50% job done for behavioral interviews.
MOST IMPORTANT PART - you must SOUND genuinely passionate when answering this question. Practise rehearsing your lines in front of a mirror for this question - it may help.

**3. What has been the biggest failure of your career till now ?**
OR
**What is the most critical feedback received from your boss in your entire career ?**

Even if there is no such thing in reality (for people with say less than 3 years of experience), do craft a reasonable story.
Talk about a time when you caused a major feature break, or a serious bug missed by you which came through customer etc.
You can add that it caused a lot of chaos and I received very critical feedback from my boss saying - "*I did not expect this mistake from you*".
Then talk about some corrective actions which you took, like enhancing test automation, or getting into TDD mode etc and this helped in minimizing future recurrences of such nature. YES, talking about corrective actions is the most important part here.

If possible, support with data like - this enhancement in our process helped in preventing at least 20 show stopper bugs from slipping in.

**4. What does your typical day at work look like ?**

Talk about your routine like - we have daily status meetings as first thing in the morning, then we get onto development/debugging work, customer calls etc. Try to compress in 3-4 sentences at max.
Again, SOUND passionate and energetic when answering this question.

Here the interviewer may ask a follow-up question - **what do you do in your free time at work**?
Possible answer - I prefer to read about other components of the product on which I have not worked, and try to understand how to debug/troubleshoot those pieces of code.
Or else - my company has a huge repository of learning resources - I try to learn new things etc

Basic motive is to showcase being eager to learn.

**Another flavor of above question** - *describe your current role*.
In this case, give an overview of your current responsibilities, like I am developer/lead on this project, working in a team of X number of people. I am responsible for X, Y and Z parts of the project. Be honest about whether you are a hands-on coder or a hybrid of coding and team management or a pure manager.
In case you are more on the management side, then be prepared to justify how do you keep your technical skills up-to-date.

**5. Explain about your current product/project at a high level.**

Here, we need to be very cautious. NO - never disclose any confidential details.
Try to explain the product using a high level architectural/block diagram (if interviewer allows) or else prepare a crisp 5-6 sentence description of the same.

**6. What would you like to improve at your current workplace ?**
OR
**What do you dislike/hate at your current job/workplace ?**

Again a trap - if you badmouth your current employer or use any words like **hate** or **dislike**, it is guaranteed to go against you.

Talk about generic things like - sometimes code reviews take a long time due to senior developers being busy - probably that can be streamlined.
Or say - we should invest more in enhancing the test automation infrastructure, which often takes a backseat due to various constraints

Basically, try to stay around technical things, and avoid talking about poor cafeteria or no free cab pickup-drop services etc.
The motive is to show your passion towards work related things and not focus on secondary things like cafeteria or cabs or playgrounds etc.

**7. Are you happy at your current job ?**

This is also a big trap.
If you talk only about goody-goody positive things, then this question will be immediately followed by - **if you like your job, then why are you looking around for another job**?

So, answer it diplomatically around point 1 of this post. Talk about good things like - I have gotten to learn a lot.

If by any chance your current job is your first job - then definitely talk about things like - I learnt the ways of working of industry in this job and hence this job will always be special for me etc etc.

Then talk about negatives - again in polished way - now the product has really evolved and hence there is not much productive work to do other than customer support or maintenance etc. Or else say that I have worked for a really long time on same technology stack, and want to expand my breadth by getting a chance to work on other technologies.

You may also borrow few points listed in **"Why do you want to quit your current job"** above in this post.

**8. How would you react if you get to know that your boss is younger than you (or has less years of experience than you) ?**

This one is a *make-or-break cultural fit question*. Always answer diplomatically saying that age/years etc are irrelevent for me. What matters for me is what can I learn from someone irrespective of whether that person is junior or senior to me. I can learn a few things from my boss for sure, and if it turns out that I am more experienced or older than my boss, then I am sure I can be a valuable resource for my boss in terms of helping out with critical decision making. My experience will definitely be an asset for my boss in such cases.

Throw in examples of successful sports team of any sport which you like, there will be several examples where the captain of a successful sports team is younger than a senior important veteran player of the team. If you can give that type of analogy, your answer will sound more genuine/natural.

**9. What would you do if you find your senior or boss doing something unethical or violating a company policy ?**

Always talk about that you would gently point out to that person directly, and request that person to follow the correct process. In case the violations continue, then I would like to know about the violation reporting policy of your company.

Here, you can turnaround the interview by **cross-questioning** your interviewer - "**by the way, can you give a brief insight into policy violation reporting mechanism which exists in this company ?**"

**10. Who has been your ideal/best boss ?**

Talk about any boss who was a strong decision maker, always stood by the team, and openly praised contributions by team members, and also clearly guided the team members towards career growth.

**Yes, such bosses are very rare in real life** - but even if you did not have one such boss in your real life, do talk along these lines.

Nobody is going to conduct an enquiry about whether you really had a boss who had all these qualities or not.
Just be careful - **not to take any person's name** while talking about these qualities. If explicitly asked, just politely say that I want to respect the privacy of that person, hence won't take any names.

You can talk like - "*Yes, I have been very fortunate to work under one/two such boss(es) earlier in my career. I learnt a lot from him/her/them. I always found that person to be always supportive of the team, and that person was the only person who actually told me the difference between a Software Engineer and a Senior Software Engineer in clear measurable terms etc etc.*"

**11. Describe the worst boss you have ever worked under.**

NEVER NEVER EVER start describing that one bad boss you may have encountered. Be very very diplomatic here.
One slip of tongue in answering this one - and you are already rejected as "*being a poor culture fit*".

You can say something like this and create a reasonable story like this - "*Well, nobody is perfect - everyone is good in some things and not so good in other things. Regarding my bosses, I am not able to think of anyone who can be labelled as worst as such. I learnt something or other from each and every boss I worked under.*
*If I have to explicitly describe the shortcomings of any particular boss, then I will not exactly call it a shortcoming, but I feel it was his extraordinary passion towards his work. I had a boss who often used to get so carried away in work when working with us in brainstorming/discussion sessions that we would often end up getting very delayed for lunch.*
*Initially I found it irritating, but with the passage of time, I realised that he was a person of extreme dedication and passion towards his work. The more I worked with him, the more I learnt from him. And coming to this lunch time issue, I hesitatingly brought up this point once with him privately, and he happily agreed to have working lunch in such cases.*

*So, in a nutshell - there are no bad bosses - it is just that their way of working/thinking is drastically different from ours.*"

Prepare 2-3 stories of this type, just in case the interviewer adds a follow-up like - "**any other irritating bosses you worked under**".

So, the whole idea is to **mould a highly negative conversation towards a positive direction**.

**12. If you are say 5+ years experienced and mention that you yourself are an interviewer** - then you may be asked to **describe your strategy of taking interviews** - **stuff like what type of questions you ask, and what are you trying to judge based on that question**.

In such case, be ready with 2-3 questions and present them as your **pet questions**.
Be ready with justification like - by asking this tricky coding problem, I try to judge upto what extent the candidate can think, can the candidate come up with different approaches etc.
By asking this question Y - I try to get a feel as to whether the candidate will be a decent cultural fit in our company or not.

Be prepared for a **follow-up** like - "**if you have to look at your own interview rounds going on right now in this company, what do you think the interviewers were trying to judge about you.**"
Try to answer on similar lines staying close to job description. You can say - "as this job is for a Senior Software Engineer, so it is expected that the interviewer would like to be fully convinced about my coding abilities. So, it is quite natural that I was asked X, Y, Z. In the current round, I believe you are trying to take a call as to whether people would like to work with me as a teammate, and hence you are trying your best not to er in judging me as a person."

**13. What is your greatest weakness ?**

No, NO, NO - please do not talk about being impatient or pushing your team hard etc etc. These are all very very well-known answers.

Talk about something more genuine and possibly not related to work - I am not so good at remembering road directions, or maybe people whose first/second language is not English may feel that occasionally I speak too fast.

But be prepared to answer - **what are you doing to overcome this weakness** ?
Possible answers to above examples may be - I am trying to get better at remembering road directions by observing the landmarks more closely when I pass through any road
or
I consciously try to speak at a slower pace and in a neutral accent when interacting with people whose first/second language may not be English. I am actually trying to learn more about different cultures across the globe to be sensitive to their requirements.
*If you talk about culture, be prepared to talk about a few interesting facts about culture of few countries - e.g. using left hand to give/take something in Asian countries may be considered offensive, tipping is not considered good in some countries but is a natural expectation in some other countries etc.*

Being culturally sensitive is very very important for working in any MNC.

**14. Why should we hire you?**
OR
**Why do you think you are a good fit for this role/job ?**

Again a cliche question. Just talk about your passion for the role, talk about how your skills are a perfect match for this role, definitely do highlight any not-so-common achievement of yours (may be you have been a state level player, or maybe you appeared on a TV show - use it to market your people skills, maybe you won multiple scholarships in your career).
And at the end say - I strongly believe these qualities of mine make me a worthy candidate for this role.
Mark the wording - worthy - NOT perfect. Be very cautious as to *NOT to sound arrogant*.

**15. [For fresh graduates/postgraduates only] What is your favorite subject and why ?**

Be prepared with 2-3 names, because sometimes the interviewer may dig like - **second favorite subject** ?

It is upto you whether you want to stay with routine subjects like Algorithms, Data Structures etc or choose something else like Machine Learning, AI, Computer Graphics, Computer Networks.
To answer the **why** part, NEVER EVER say things like because I always score good grades/marks in this subject. You must be able to give a solid justification about the real world applicability of the concepts taught in those subjects.

Some examples maybe - Data structures is the basic foundation of any software which we use in real life.
Or
Machine learning is the basic concept behind so many useful features like recommended news, purchase suggestions on e-commerce sites etc
Or
Computer Graphics is the very reason we get to see such amazing 3D/4D movies like <name any of your favorite 3D/4D movies>

Also, a word of caution here - maybe you studied a subject named Advanced Algorithms or say Advanced Concepts in Computer Networks - AVOID the word **advanced** if you can. Because, using **the word advanced may open up a pandora box** and you may get bombarded with several questions about concepts which you may not even have heard of !!

**16. [For fresh graduates/postgraduates only] Which subject(s) do you HATE and why ?**

This one is a very tricky question to answer, and you need a solid justification for the same.

You should NEVER use the word HATE but say something like I am not very much interested in this subject X.

X can be some compulsory elective course which is not exactly related to Computer Science but is a part of your college/university curricullum. You can justify by saying that I have tried very hard to understand where would I need to apply the concept taught in that subject, in the field of software engineering.

By any chance, if your least favorite subject is related to Computer Science, then the only possible way to justify it could be - I have never gotten any chance to **practically apply** the concepts taught in that subject. There are indeed some subjects which are taught only theoretically - if that is the case then you can give this justification.

Or even better - you can also say that there is no subject which I would put in the category of dislike/hate, because every subject has its own importance.

**17. [For fresh graduates/postgraduates only] Tell me about your major/degree project.**

Be prepared to explain each and everything in thorough detail.
Try to structure your answer like this

Motive - what inspired you to take up this project? Justify with some real world application - max 2-3 sentences
Initial exploration - what all did you read up about it - max 2-3 sentences
Implementation details - preferably a flow/block diagram (if possible), and 5-6 sentence summary explanation
What did you learn from this task - I learnt how to actually implement a Classifier/NeuralNetwork, I learnt a new tool/language named X etc. (2-3 sentences at max)