Behavioral (Competency Based) Interviews

Overview

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. Employing the use of job analysis to identify core competencies (behavioral attributes) for a success in a particular role or position, an interviewer will conduct a behavioral interview to elicit responses from a candidate that indicate when the candidate did or did not demonstrate those competencies in their previous jobs or in school.

How to Answer a Behavioral Interview Question

Interview questions are written to elicit answers that will reflect how a candidate has demonstrated (or not) a particular competency. Interviewers using behavioral interviewing techniques are trained to look for three (3) key components of any answer to their questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation/Task</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the basic situation, task, or problem that you are giving to answer the behavioral questions?</td>
<td>What action(s) did you take? What decisions did you make to handle the task or resolve the situation or problem? How did you make those decisions? VITAL: Remember that ACTION is the heart of the STAR format in your answer!</td>
<td>What was the result of the action? How did it benefit the organization, department, or relationship? What were your lessons learned?</td>
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This format is usually identified as the STAR acronym used to develop answers to behavioral questions.

Effective answers should take a reasonable amount of time to provide the interviewer with enough information about the actions taken. Types of answers to AVOID in behavioral interviews:

- Theoretical (Stay out of the woods!)
- Opinion (What do you think/feel about...)

As with every other interview style, interviewers are constantly assessing the candidate’s communication ability as an observed competency.

While most interview questions are designed to uncover what a candidate can do, motivational fit assesses what a candidate wants to do. Applicants often fail to consider job fit (whether someone will find the work itself personally satisfying) and organization fit (whether someone will find the company culture satisfying).
Motivational Fit is the degree of alignment between what a person expects or wants from a job, and what the job can actually offer. Experts say that Motivational Fit is a primary component in determining whether a person will remain on the job.

Intrinsic factors could include such items as intensity of customer contact, degree of autonomy of supervision, tracking own performance vs. getting feedback from others. Extrinsic factors might include: physical work environment, schedule, level of compensation, supervisory style.

**How to Prepare For a Behavioral Interview**

- Research the company’s mission, vision, and core values. These documents are a great indication of what is important to the organization, its culture and what is expected of employees.
- Analyze the type of position for which you are applying. Try to get an actual job description. If a job description isn’t available, review again the job advertisement. What skills are required by the employer?
- Analyze your own background. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you have that relate to the job?
- Identify specific examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. How can you “tell a story” about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing complete STAR answers and remember that a good story has a beginning, middle, and end.
- Identify 2 to 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey those points (with demonstrated STAR stories) during the interview.
- Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- Be prepared to provide examples of mistakes or when things didn’t turn out as planned. What did you do? Lessons learned? How did you apply those lessons?
- Develop several questions for the interviewer about the specific job you are seeking, the employer, and the industry of the employer. Be prepared to ask them during the interview.

**During the Interview**

- Remember, honesty is the best policy. If you can’t come up with an example, be honest. Don’t lie!
- DON’T edit yourself! Provide as much detail about your actions in your example as possible. The interviewer will let you know if you’re giving too much information.
- Expect follow-up questions to your answers.
- DO ask questions when given the opportunity!
- Smile and be yourself!

**Sample Behavioral Interview Answer**

**Question:** Describe a time when you worked on a team. What role did you play?
Situation/Task: Last quarter, I was part of a team of five people for a group project in my Introduction to Marketing class where we were given an assignment to develop a marketing strategy for a new line of toys for Mattel. As part of the group project, we were required to create a 15 page marketing plan by the end of the last day of class.

Action: I was the team leader and was in charge of coordinating all of the group meetings and delegating tasks. I took the initiative to create a meeting schedule so that our group met every Wednesday afternoon, emailed the agenda to each group member prior to our meetings, and kept an Excel spreadsheet of all the tasks. I also worked on making sure that the team was cohesive and supportive of each other by mediating conflicts, by facilitating discussion, listening to each member, and helping them to work toward a compromise.

Result: As a result of my efforts as team leader, we were able to finish the group project one week ahead of schedule and also were chosen as the group with the “most innovative” marketing plan. Also, the number of conflicts between group members significantly decreased and we were able to agree upon a marketing plan that satisfied everyone.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions and Competencies

The following are samples of several competency groups and corresponding questions that employers might wish to explore with a candidate. Please be aware that there are numerous competencies not included below that might be explored during the behavioral interview process. Examples of competencies might include: creativity/innovation, problem solving/critical thinking, productivity, strategic thinking, teamwork/collaboration, resilience, and many others.

Interpersonal Skills/Building Relationships:

1. Describe a situation in which you were new to an organization and/or team. What challenges did you face and what did you do to become accepted as a team member?
2. It is very important to build good relationships at work but sometimes it doesn’t always work. If you can, tell about a time when you were not able to build a successful relationship with a difficult person.

Decision Making:

1. Discuss an important decision you have made regarding a task or project at work. What factors influenced your decision?
2. Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Initiative:

1. Give me examples of projects/task you started on your own.
2. Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
Results Orientation:

1. Tell me about a time when you were required to develop a measurement plan for your project, product, or program and present your results and conclusions.
2. Describe a situation where you were responsible for leading a market research or strategic analysis initiative and the results of the project.

Conflict Resolution:

1. Give me a situation where you faced conflict on the job.
2. Pick a particular conflict situation and briefly explain how you resolved it.

Motivation Fit:

1. When were you most satisfied/dissatisfied in your work (most current work)? This question is trying to get at what motivates you to do your best! Provide a concrete example of a particular situation where you were most satisfied (or dissatisfied) with your work or performance on a project, assignment or work situation.