



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

When you're in the job market, it's important to be prepared to handle what's known as "behavioral interviewing." Employers use this type of interview to get insight into how you handle specific situations in the workplace. The interviewer will want examples of what happened in a particularly challenging circumstance, what you did, and how you achieved a positive outcome.

Behavioral interviews include scenario-based questions, content-based questions, hypothetical questions, open-ended questions, and any questions for which there is generally no right or wrong answer. The interviewee's response typically takes the form of a story or anecdote.



SCENARIO-BASED QUESTIONS

Behavioral interview questions usually begin like this....

Tell me about a time when you ...

Give me an example of ...

Describe a situation in which ...

What would you do if ...

You'll be more informed and more confident in your responses if you plan ahead and prepare thoroughly for your interview. The best approach to preparing for a behavioral interview is to anticipate the type of questions you may be asked, research the company and the job, learn about the skills and qualifications the employer is seeking, and think about questions you yourself will ask. You should also organize and outline the descriptions you will use to talk about your background and credentials.

Most importantly, be ready to tell stories. Take the time to collect stories, anecdotes, situations, examples, and circumstances. Think about past events and projects that you can talk about in detail. Use these stories to highlight your ability to address challenges and solve problems.

TELLING STORIES

Recall recent situations that show positive behaviors or actions, especially involving your education, your experience, workplace issues, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, organizing, and customer service. Prepare short descriptions of each situation. Be ready to give details if asked.

Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and end. Be ready to describe the situation, including the task at hand, your action, and the outcome or result. Be sure the outcome or result reflects favorably on you. Be positive and sincere. Display emotions. Be specific. Don't generalize about several events. Give a detailed accounting of one event. Vary your examples. Don't take them all from just one area of your life.

During the interview session, when you are asked a question, give yourself a few moments to gather your thoughts and frame your response. If you are not sure how to answer the question, ask for clarification. This will buy you some extra time to think about how to answer.

"STAR" TECHNIQUE

The STAR technique offers four important points in helping you to devise a response to behavioral questions. Do keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to behavioral interview questions. The interviewer's goal is to understand how you acted in a given situation. How you respond will determine if there is a match between your skills and the position the company is seeking to fill.

STAR is an acronym for four key concepts... Situation, Task, Action, Result. Each concept is a step the candidate can take to answer a behavioral interview question. By utilizing these four steps, the candidate can provide a clear and succinct response.



Example Question 2: What do you do when a team member refuses to complete his or her portion of the work?

Example Answer 2: When there are team conflicts or issues, I always try my best to step up as team leader if needed. I think my communication skills make me an effective leader and moderator. For example, once I was working on a team project, and two of the team members got into an argument, both refusing to complete their assignments. They were both dissatisfied with their workloads, so I arranged a team meeting where we rearranged the assignments for the team. This made everyone happier and more productive, and our project was a success.

USING THE “STAR” MODEL

To prepare yourself to give an effective response, first listen to the question and think of a relevant event or situation....

Situation - Describe the event or situation that you were in.

Task - Explain the task you had to complete or the function you had to perform.

Action - Describe the specific actions you took to complete the task.

Result - What was the outcome or result of your efforts.

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result. Behavioral interview questions are questions about how you have behaved in past circumstances. Specifically, they are about how you have handled certain work situations. Since past performance can be a good prediction of the future, interviewers ask these questions to see if candidates have the skills and experiences required for the job. The best behavioral interview strategy includes listening carefully, being clear and detailed when you respond and, most importantly, expressing positive and authentic emotions while you are telling your story.

“STAR” EXAMPLES

Example Question 1: Tell me about a time you had to complete a task under a tight deadline. Describe the situation, and explain how you handled it.

Example Answer 1: While I typically like to plan my work out in stages and complete it piece by piece, I can also achieve strong work results under a tight deadline. Once at a former company, an employee left days before a big project of his was due. I was asked to take it over, with only a few days to learn about and complete the project. I created a task force, delegated work, and we all completed the assignment with a day to spare. I think I tend to thrive under tight deadlines.

CONCEPTS OF “STAR”

The concepts in the STAR acronym include:

Situation: Describe a task that you needed to accomplish or the context within which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with a coworker. This situation can be from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific and organized in your explanation as possible. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.

Task: Next, describe your responsibility in that situation. What goal were you working toward? Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project under a tight deadline, solve a problem, resolve a conflict with a coworker, or hit a sales target.

Action: You then describe how you completed the task or endeavored to meet the challenge. Explain the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail. What specific steps did you take and what was your particular contribution? Focus on what you did, rather than what your team, boss, or coworker did.

Result: Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. Don't be shy about taking credit for your achievement. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your story contains multiple positive results.



“STAR” RESPONSE OUTLINE

Situation: Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Task: My goal was to generate new ideas, materials and incentives that would result in at least a 15% increase in advertisers from the year before.

Action: I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of our circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a business professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Result: We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent over the same period last year.

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.



- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict?
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or coworker.
- Give an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
- Describe a failed project and the lessons you learned from it.



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