



The Behavioral Interview

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Career Services

The behavioral interview technique has been in use for at least 20 years. It has become increasingly popular in technical and high tech industries within the last 5 years. Behavioral interviews are designed to focus on an individual's past experiences and performance in seeking to identify desired behaviors that are necessary for success on the job.

What is a Behavioral Interview Like?

There are some subtle and obvious clues to look for. The traditional interview will include questions related to your skills or to how you would handle a situation or task. The behavioral interview may not address skills, and will include questions asking you to describe how you did handle a situation or task. In a behavioral interview the interviewer will probe, asking you to provide details, but will steer you away from theorizing or generalizing about events. The behavioral interview will usually be more structured, and may be more controlled by the interviewer, rather than letting you concentrate on areas you see as important. The behavioral interviewer will probably take many notes during the interview.

Preparing for the Behavioral Interview

First of all, don't be intimidated. Remember that you will be in an interview, but you will have the opportunity to tell brief stories about yourself. Think of some recent situations that demonstrate favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving work experience, a class experience, leadership, teamwork, or initiative. Be specific; don't generalize about several events or a possible situation. Use the STAR acronym to provide a framework for your answer. Briefly explain the Situation or Task. Give a specific description of the Action you took. Don't drop the ball at this point. Complete the story by telling the Result of the action. If you can quantify the outcome, it will have even more credibility. Make sure the outcome reflects positively on you, even if the result itself was not favorable. Be honest. Don't embellish or omit parts of the story. Behavioral interviewers are trained to probe and determine if your story is built on a weak foundation.

Some Behavioral Questions You May Hear

- “Tell me about a time you had a problem with a co-worker and how you dealt with it.”
- “Describe a time when you had to be a leader.”
- “Give me an example of a time when you worked hard to overcome a challenge or meet a difficult goal.”
- “Have you ever been a member of a team when one person isn't pulling his or her weight? How did you deal with it?”
- “What was your favorite class? Why?”

Follow-up questions may include:

- “Can you give me an example?”
- “What did you do or say?”
- “What was your role?”
- “What was the result?”

The Basics

Your interview will probably include a mixture of traditional and behavioral questions. You will probably also find opportunities to make references to specific technical skills in your responses to behavioral questions.

The best preparation for any interview is to do your research. Research the company, and research yourself. Know the questions you should expect, and prepare your responses in advance. Be ready to put your best foot forward by being properly attired and well groomed, arriving promptly, and demonstrating enthusiasm, confidence, and a positive attitude.