



Behavioral Interviews

What is the Behavioral Interview?

Behavioral interviewing is a common format used by many employers. Whether or not an employer you are interviewing with uses this type of format, it is to your advantage to become familiar with these techniques and the interviewing skills gained can greatly enhance the traditional interview as well. The basic premise behind the behavioral interview is:

“Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior”

Traditional interviews are often based on hypothetical scenarios and generally ask the candidate to predict behavior based on these scenarios. Behavioral interviews, on the other hand, require the candidate to draw on personal experiences and discuss how they handled these specific and real situations. In other words, while a traditional interviewer might ask what you would do in a certain situation, the behavioral interviewer will ask what you did do in a certain situation. Notice the difference in this example:

Traditional question: How do you work under pressure?

Behavioral question: Give me an example of a time you had to meet an unexpected deadline.

In a behavioral interview, the interviewer will also “probe” to find out more information from the candidate, asking for more details, names, dates, how others reacted, what could have been handled differently, and what the candidate learned from the experience. This is done to eliminate any theorizing or generalizing that might occur in a traditional interview, and gives the interviewer a good sense of the candidate’s ability to reflect upon, organize and otherwise clearly communicate his or her past experiences.

The BAR Story

The challenge with behavioral and other types of interviewing is organizing one’s experiences into cohesive, clear and concise “stories”. Keeping these three elements in mind when describing your past experiences will ensure that you are providing the interviewer with key information and that your responses will flow smoothly. These three elements are:

Background (specific situation that relates to the question)

Action (what you did/role you played in the situation)

Results (what was the outcome of the situation)

Utilizing these three elements, a response to the behavioral question “give me an example of a time you had to meet an unexpected deadline” might look something like this:

Background: “I was working on a group project for my Intro to Business class, and originally we were given three weeks to complete the assignment as a team. Everything was going smoothly until one of the team members learned that he had to leave town for a family emergency and we were going to have to complete the project a week before its due date since the professor doesn’t allow late “projects”.

Action: “This was going to require some re-arranging of my schedule since it was near mid-terms and I had a lot of things to get done. First, I quickly worked with the rest of my team to set up meetings and make sure that everyone could finish his or her part with the earlier deadline. To accommodate my part of the project, I made sure I left plenty of time. I asked another member of my service group to represent our organization at a funding meeting I had originally planned to attend, and re-scheduled some social plans to spend more time on the group project and get my other coursework done as well”.



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Results: “Looking back, it seemed like a chaotic few weeks, but with everyone working together and making some personal adjustments, we got the project done on time and I was able to participate fully and share my part of the workload. We were able to turn the project into the professor a week early and earned an A. I was really pleased with how the members of my team were able to pull together and focus on doing this project well”.

Organizing your experiences in this manner will help your interviewing presentation regardless of whether you are being asked behavioral or traditional questions.

Behavioral Questions

As you begin the job search and interviewing process, it is important to draw from your past experiences and practice responding to various behavioral questions incorporating the above elements. Experience can be taken from class situations, participation in student organizations, employment, internships, or other related situations (accomplishments, study abroad, etc). As with traditional interviews, do not include inappropriate interview information indicating your religious, marital, political or sexual values.

Some sample behavioral interview questions can include:

- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a problem or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you wish you had used better time management skills
- Give an example of a situation where you assumed a leadership role.
- What was a specific mistake that you made and how did you handle the situation?
- Describe a time when you were on a team and one of the team members wasn't pulling his or her weight

Information obtained from:

Union College Career Center, Schenectady, NY

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