

Behavioral Interviewing

What is Behavioral Interviewing?

Behavioral Interviewing is a new style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is this: the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that are job related.

Critical Points About Behavioral Interviewing

Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are looking and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely.

Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks. Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated SAR stories) during the interview.

During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them about the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. Your answer must contain these three steps (situation, activity, result or "SAR") for optimum success.

It is helpful to frame your answer as a story that you can tell. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. They refer to this as "digging a well." The interviewer will sometimes ask you open ended questions to allow you to choose which examples you wish to use. When a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, he/she will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include, "What were you thinking at that point?" or, "Tell me more about your meeting with that person." or, "Lead me through your decision process."

Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level or authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."

Also, be prepared to provide examples of when things didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do?

Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, research, community service and work experience. In addition, you may use examples of which you may be especially proud such as running a marathon, exhibiting paintings in an art show, climbing all the Adirondack High Peaks, designing a web site, biking across the country, etc.

Examples of an SAR Answer

Situation: When I started working in my current research group, I noticed that approximately 30% of our lab notes were not being followed accurately on subsequent projects.

Action: I organized our research group to develop new procedures for recording and following lab notes.

Result: We now follow the new procedures and consistently achieve results we expect when completing repetitive or similar tasks and projects.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgement to solve a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, & environments.
- Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you didn't agree.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.