



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral Interviewing, an increasingly common format used by recruiters, is based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. You will be asked to describe past experiences and provide specific details about what you **did, accomplished, and learned**, etc.

Behavioral Interviews Overview

An interviewer using behavioral techniques would ask the same question this way. “Give me a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer. What was the problem and what was the outcome?” Your mind races and you come up with an answer. Imagine a lengthy interview with questions that ask for specific examples of past experiences. The other problem that you will encounter in behavioral interviews is that many of the questions are negative. “Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at your previous job that cost the company time and money.” Your mind races again and you search for an event that wasn’t too terribly bad. The interviewer follows up with, “Is that the worst mistake you ever made?” The questions are very difficult and if you try to dance around the question, the interviewer has been taught to press even harder to get the truth.

The interviewer determines the capabilities and traits (often referred to as probes) that are essential for success in a position. Probes include: Assertiveness, Clarification, Commitment to Task, Dealing with Ambiguity, Decision Making, Interaction, Leadership, Management Skills, Communication Skills, Organization Skills, Problem Solving, Team Building, and others. Each probe lists various questions that are designed to determine whether the candidate has the ability or not based on specific past experiences.

When preparing, identify an unsuccessful example for each probe because you will probably be asked to give an example of a time when things didn’t work out as planned. One way to end an answer to a negative probe is to say something like: “the mistake caused me to delay the project, but it helped me to develop a project tracking system which would minimize the chance of that happening again.” Remember, mistakes are what help us learn. Whatever you do, don’t tell the interviewer that you really can’t think of any mistakes that you made. More and more companies are adopting Behavioral interviews because they are very effective in identifying the best candidate for the opening. Understanding behavioral interviews is the key to preparing for one. Preparing for behavioral interviews can significantly help you in traditional interviews because you can give the traditional interviewer a specific answer to a theoretical question.

*Excerpted from **Winning Career Strategies**, by Damir Joseph Stimac. He is a published author and has been a guest on radio and television shows on career related issues.*

Tips and Suggestions

Know your own strengths and accomplishments. Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments, successes, projects, activities, etc.

Listen carefully to each question and take time to organize your response.

Ask for clarification if needed (“Am I answering your question? Do you mean...?”)

Tell the interviewer about a specific situation, not a vague general one.

Focus on your role in the situation, unless specifically asked otherwise. Focus on “I...” not “we...”.

Avoid vague or hypothetical responses, such as “I usually...” “I always...” “I never...”.

Very personal examples or experiences are not appropriate for an interview.

Answer the question that is asked, not one you may have already rehearsed.

There may be little time for you to ask questions, but have questions just in case.

Sample Questions

Tell me about a major project you had to plan for school or work. (Organizational skills)

Describe a situation when you had several things to do in a limited time. (Ability to set priorities, time management)

Tell me about a time when you helped to resolve a group problem. (Teamwork skills, interpersonal skills)

Tell me about a time when you had to turn to someone else for assistance. (Knowing limitations)

Talk about a situation when you had to take charge to get something done. (Taking initiative, responsibility)

Tell me about a time when you had to learn and apply something new in a short time. (Ability to learn and apply knowledge)

Describe something you did that you are particularly proud of or consider an accomplishment. (Leads to follow-up questions on HOW ... planning, leadership, delegation, etc.)

Behavioral Interviewing – “More than a Gut Feeling”

*Below is a list of questions taken from the video, “More than a Gut Feeling II.” **

1. Think of a problem person you had to deal with on your last job. Tell me exactly what happened and how you handled it.
2. Describe a situation in which you felt it might be necessary to break company policy or alter standard procedure.
3. Give me an example of a time when communicating with a customer was very difficult.
4. Think of a day in which you had many things to do and describe how you scheduled your time.
5. Tell me something you’ve done in your job that was creative.
6. Tell me about a time you made a quick decision that you are proud of.
7. Tell me about a specific goal you set for yourself in the past and how successful you were in accomplishing it.
8. You’ve heard the expression, “being able to roll with the punches.” Tell me about a time when you had to do just that when dealing with a difficult person.
9. When you had a job to do that was particularly uninteresting, how did you handle it?
10. What experience have you had with a miscommunication with a customer or fellow employee?
11. Tell me about a time when an upper-level decision or policy change held up your work.
12. Describe a situation in your last job when you could structure your own work schedule --- what did you do?
13. In a past job, tell me about a time when you stuck to procedure or company policy when it would have been easier not to?
14. Tell me about a time when you’ve had a problem with decisiveness --- how did you handle it?
15. Describe a situation when you made a tough decision where no policy existed --- how did you handle it?
16. Tell me about a time you had when you weren’t successful in dealing with a tough decision you had to make.
17. Tell me about a time when you had to deliver some unpleasant feelings to a supervisor.
18. Tell me about a time when you didn’t communicate something unpleasant but should have.
19. What was one obstacle you had to overcome in your last job?
20. Describe an obstacle in your last job that you were not able to overcome.

*”More than a Gut Feeling II.” American Media Incorporated. W. Des Moines, IA

Behavioral Interviews – A Job Candidate’s Toughest Obstacle

Copyright 1995, D. Joseph Stimac. All rights reserved.

Reprinted with permission of the author.