

Acing Behavioral Interviews



"Tell me about a time you took initiative and went above and beyond the call of duty."

"Describe the most creative idea that you've implemented to solve a problem."

"Tell me about the most difficult group project you have ever had to work on."

If you've heard questions like these during a hiring process, you've been part of a behavioral-based interview. It's an assessment that focuses on what you've done in the past. And as you might expect, behavioral interviews are different from traditional ones.

Want to ace your next behavioral interview? Then it's critical to learn the theory behind behavioral interviews, the types of questions asked, and the best preparation methods.

Why Do Employers Use Behavioral Interviews?

Over the past 15 years, behavioral interviews have become increasingly popular because they allow companies to make better hiring decisions. They're based on the premise that past behavior is the best way to predict future performance. It's a practical approach to interviewing because, the fact is, people do not tend to change. That's why the interviewer is interested in how you *did* behave in the past, not how you *would* behave in the future.

What Kinds of Questions are Asked in Behavioral Interviews?

The interviewer first identifies the key behavioral traits a candidate should possess to be successful in the position. He or she then develops a list of questions designed to find out whether candidates show evidence of the desired traits. For example, if

teamwork is one of the critical traits, the interviewer might ask questions like these:

- Give me some examples of how you encouraged others to share their ideas with you. Were their ideas useful?
- Tell me about a time when you felt it necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- Tell me about your most challenging work situation in a team environment. How did you resolve it?



How Can You Perform Well During Behavioral Interviews?

Preparation is the key! Here are some tips to help you get ready:

- 1. Learn about the company and the position.** Pay particular attention to its core values, since several of the behavioral questions will likely relate to them. You should also uncover the key traits of the position for which you are applying. Start by looking for clues in the job description, or ask the hiring manager what abilities will be assessed during the interview.
- 2. Gather your workplace success stories.** These examples should demonstrate that you possess the traits necessary to perform well in the position. You should identify at least one example for each of the identified traits. Recent ones are the best. Be sure these stories reflect well on you (even if the outcome itself was not favorable).

3. Make sure your stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. A great way to include these components is by using the STAR technique. The beginning of your story should describe the **S**ituation you were in or the **T**ask you needed to accomplish. The middle of your story should recount the **A**ction you took. The end of your story should outline the **R**esults you achieved.

If an interviewer asked you about your most challenging work situation as a team member, for example, you might respond with a STAR story similar to this one:



Situation or **T**ask

Action  **R**esults

As team leader for a new product analysis, I once worked with an employee who consistently failed to deliver information he was responsible for gathering. Without his data, the project could not be completed by the aggressive deadline.

I spoke about the problem with this person, and I determined that the large number of administrative functions he was responsible for were preventing him from meeting his objectives.

To solve the problem, I asked another employee to take over several of this team member's administrative duties. He was able to focus better on the project, and I was able to make sure it was completed on time.

4. Be specific--be honest. When you tell your stories, include all of the important details. Provide hard facts and statistics whenever possible. And be honest at all costs. Behavioral interviewers are trained to probe, and they will discover if you are embellishing or lying.

Practice Makes Perfect

With a bit of practice, you'll be able to use a relatively small number of stories to answer a great number of behavioral questions. And once you can show an employer you possess the traits necessary to succeed, you'll be on your way to landing the job you want.