

BEHAVIORIAL BASED INTERVIEWING

Research has shown that past actions in similar circumstances are the best predictor of future performance. The predictive power increases when the past behavior is recent and forms a consistent pattern over time.

The purpose of behavioral interviewing is to gain information that will most closely represent how the candidate will perform. This is accomplished by eliciting descriptions of the candidate's actual behavior in a similar circumstance (preferably within the recent past).

Most candidates are not accustomed to answering interview questions in such detail. For example, in response to the question "what did you find most frustrating about your current job?", a candidate for a secretarial position may reply "In general, I don't like typing multiple drafts of the same document." In order to get at behavioral information, you must direct the candidate to provide a specific example (e.g., the last time this occurred). Ask what the candidate actually did in this situation, how she/he felt and thought at the time.

Typically, when an interviewee is thinking about a behavioral example, he or she will break eye contact with the interviewer and seem to drift away mentally from the interview. When the candidate recalls a specific event, he/she will resume eye contact with the interviewer as the description begins.

Most behavioral examples are characterized by specific reference to names, dates, times, numbers, and locations. For example, an interviewee's response that would meet these criteria is detailed as follows:

Question: *"Tell me about your role during a crisis situation."*

Answer: *"Well, last October when I was with ABC Corporation, we were facing the most pressured, demanding time of the year when a flu epidemic struck the office. Out of seven people in the office, five were sick, leaving myself and one secretary to get all of the work done. For two weeks, I put in 12-hour days to meet all of our customer's needs. During that time, I also had to make a service trip to Calgary to deal with a \$100 million account that was in jeopardy. When it was all over, my boss threw a surprise party in the office to congratulate me on handling the situation."*

To encourage applicants to generate behavioral examples, it is useful to use superlative adjectives – those that indicate the extremes (e.g., most, last, least, toughest, worst, best). Using these adjectives is helpful for three reasons:

- it generally stimulates memory of a specific event, making it easier for the candidate to respond to the question;
- it places the event into context for the interviewer – if you understand what is the "most" and "least" of a particular quality, you get some sense of the scale used by the applicant, and,
- It is "freeing" for the candidate because it implies that 'of course everyone has such experiences'.

In order to construct a behavioral question, you must first identify the requirements of the job and the core competencies required for effective performance in that position. A receptionist, for example, would need to be tactful and diplomatic. How would someone exercise tact and diplomacy? He or she would be courteous, polite, accommodating and fair. Once you have determined how that behavior will be demonstrated, you need to identify how it can be measure, and then construct questions which will give you information about this dimension (see example on the following page).

Be prepared to probe by asking many questions. For example, if you were trying to determine a candidate's ability to demonstrate tact and diplomacy, you might ask:

"Tell me about the last time you were required to use tact and diplomacy to solve a problem at work."

Possible follow-up questions include:

- **What did you do?**
- **What led up to that situation?**
- **What was the outcome?**
- **Did you receive any feedback from others on how you handled the situation?**
- **If you had it to do again, what would you do differently?**

Be careful not to draw negative conclusions about a dimension from a single example. Look for contrary evidence. When you find that you are unduly impressed by a candidate's responses, you might say: "That's very impressive. Was there ever an occasion when things didn't work out quite so well?" If the candidate is responding honestly, then an example will be forthcoming.

If the behavior is negative, ensure that it is part of a pattern and not a single occurrence before you draw conclusions. Let's say, for example, that the candidate gave an example of going around the manager in order to get things done. If this behavior is consistent, it could be of concern. Ask another question to determine whether this is true

Elicit as many behavioral examples as necessary to get a sense of how the candidate has performed in similar circumstances. Weight the questions according to the relative importance of the skills and core competencies, that is, ask the most questions about tact and diplomacy (in the receptionist example) if you think that is the most important competency required for the position.

1. Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
2. Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.
3. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
4. Tell me about a time when you had to use your spoken communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
5. Can you tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt?
6. Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates.
7. Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
8. Describe a situation in which you felt it necessary to be very attentive and vigilant to your environment.
9. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
10. Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
11. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you've completed.
12. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
13. Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.
14. Describe a situation in which you were able to read another person effectively and guide your actions by your understanding of his/her individual needs or values.
15. What did you do in your last job in order to be effective with your organization and planning? Be specific.
16. Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
17. Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
18. Give me an example of a time when you had to analyze another person carefully or a situation in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision.

19. What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.
20. Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.
21. Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.
22. Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
23. Describe a situation in which others within your organization depended on you.
24. Describe your most recent group effort.
25. Describe the worst customer or co-worker you have ever had and tell me how you dealt with him or her.