

How to prepare for behavioural-based job interviews

Behavioural interviewing or targeted selection is a technique commonly used by HR recruiters to identify suitable candidates for roles. Behavioural interviewing is based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Before entering into any job interview - behavioural or otherwise - an interviewer must identify what skills and competencies are required to perform this role. By asking you very detailed questions about past experiences and actions, the interviewer can then learn whether or not you possess the right qualities. The ability to transfer skills learnt in one environment into a different setting, will be sought after by employers and as such, you need to be able to articulate your capability when responding to interview questions. For example, if an interviewer is trying to assess your ability to work in a team, a non-behavioural interview question might be: "What would you say is your greatest contribution when you work as part of a team?" The risk for the employer with this kind of question, however, is that the you may provide a well thought out answer, with all the correct ingredients (e.g. "I listen to other people's ideas, I encourage the quieter members of the group") - however the answer may not reveal your teamwork ability in 'real life' at all. This type of question measures your ability to answer questions well, rather than the actual ability to work as part of a team. A behavioural question, however, might be: "Tell me about a time when you got co-workers who disliked each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?" In this case you would be expected to describe a specific and recent time when you encountered such a situation, rather than generalising or hypothesising. The interviewer would then probe for specific details with questions such as: "What were you thinking? What were you feeling? Then what happened?"

How to answer behavioural based interview questions

A strong answer outlines the context in which events took place, the action taken by you in this situation and the result or outcome of these actions. Whilst this format may appear onerous, if you think of your response as retelling a story that you have been involved in, then answering behavioural questions in a structured way will in fact be the easiest way to convey relevant information about yourself and subsequently the relevant skills you have developed.

Because of the level of detail required, it is assumed that interviewees will find it very hard to lie convincingly when answering behaviour-based questions. Therefore, preparation - reminding yourself of a range of experiences you can talk about if appropriately questioned - is essential.

Make sure you don't refer to the same experience in order to answer all questions.

Try to identify what competencies (behaviour, attitude or skills) the interviewer is trying to measure in this question. To do this simply think of the competencies relevant for the job you applied for (i.e. what would a successful employee doing the job you applied for need to have). Once you identified them, structure your answer in a way which will demonstrate your mastery in these factors.

Find out as much as you can about the skills and qualities the potential employer seems to be seeking. This kind of information is sometimes revealed in the advertisement (if there was one), the position description, or in the general literature provided by the company including their website.

Tap your memory for stories that illustrate your skills and successes. Think back over your work or other type of experiences, extra-curricular activities, and personal achievements and ask yourself, "When did I demonstrate team work/ time management skills etc?" Think through each situation, remembering who was involved, what your role was, and what the order of events was. Practice out loud explaining your role in the situation as though you were telling a story to someone.

A couple of behavioural rules which can assist you to create the right impression in your job interview

When you enter the room, close the door and greet the interviewer. You can shake his/her hand but don't do it too strong.

Sit down comfortably and don't put your hands on the desk in front of you.

Wait patiently for the interviewer to complete his/her question. Let the interviewer manage the interview in his/her own pace.

Deliberate before each response. The first answer may not always be the best one.

Deliberation is not a sign of weakness and low confidence.

Always look at your interviewer. Never look at the ground or towards another point in the room but the interviewer's face.

Avoid any behaviour such as frequently moving your legs or changing your sitting posture, which suggest that you are tensed

Pay attention to the pitch of your voice.

Never get into an argument with your interviewer. Even if the interviewer asked a provocative question.

Try to create a good and relaxed atmosphere. Make the interviewer feel that you are cooperating, trust people and enjoys sharing information with others.

Don't apologise or become confused if you didn't hear a question. Simply ask the interviewer to repeat the question or to clarify it if you didn't understand it.

Behavioural interview questions

Have you ever wondered what behavioural interview questions (BIQs) are - and how to answer them? We've compiled the ultimate guide to help you respond to BIQs with ease in your next interview.

What are behavioural questions?

Behavioural interview questions are based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best indication of what future behaviour will be like. In asking detailed questions about specific tasks you undertook or experiences you had in a real life setting in prior roles, the employer can ascertain how you may react in similar situations in the role you are interviewing for.

How to tell when you are being asked a behavioural interview question

When you hear the words: "Tell me about a time when..." it's highly likely that the hiring manager is asking you a behavioural interview question. Other variations include:

"Describe a time when..."

"Give me an example of..."

"Have you ever...?"

How to answer behavioural questions

The CAR method

The CAR principle gives you a structured way to respond to the interviewer, by giving Context (describe the background and situation that you were in), Action (describe what action or steps you took) and Result (describe the professional outcomes you achieved).

The STAR method

The STAR method provides a similar structure, and stands for Situation or Task (describe the specific event or task you were given), Action (describe what steps you took) and Result (describe the professional outcomes you delivered to the business).

Q&A example

"Tell me about a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and how you handled it."

Context (also known as Situation or Task): I was leading a special project team. Our client shifted the deadline forward by two weeks. This had a significant impact on our suppliers. Some could deliver to the new deadline, but others couldn't.

Action: Leveraging the strong relationship that I had developed with my client already, I took the time to understand what was driving him to change the deadline. Once I understood the detail as to why it needed to be shifted, I realised that I could deliver the project to the client in phases - thus satisfying his needs, and keeping the suppliers happy. I developed a phased delivery plan and proposed this to the client.

Result: The client accepted the phased schedule, and we delivered the project on time. The client was very satisfied and as a result we were appointed another new project worth \$1 million to the business.

Three tips to answering behavioural interview questions effectively

- Do your research. Find out what skills and behaviours the employer is looking for, and mine your own CV to find examples that you think will demonstrate a good match for the role.
- Practise the CAR or STAR method out loud in advance. If you remind yourself of the acronym while telling your story, you'll stay on point.
- Don't keep referring to the same experience. Arrive at an interview armed with a few different examples that you can adapt according to the different questions asked.