

Successfully Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

Many employers are now doing “behavioral interviews.” Rather than focusing on your resume and reviewing your accomplishments as you have written them on paper, the behavioral interviewer will ask you open-ended questions that prompt you to describe real circumstances and your responses to them. General answers about behavior are not what the employer is seeking. You must describe in detail a particular event, project or experience, how you dealt with the situation and what the outcome was. The premise of behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is recent past performance in similar situations.

Although it may be more difficult to prepare in advance concrete answers to these questions in comparison to traditional ones, you can and should take some time to review your understanding of yourself, document your past successes and develop concrete examples of your accomplishments. Practice your responses so that they are honest, sincere and candid.

When you tell a behavioral story, the interviewer may try to sort out the details by understanding your behaviors. The interviewer will probe for more depth, detail or understanding with questions like, “What were you thinking at that point?” or “Tell me more about what you discussed with that person.” If you have told a story that is anything but honest and accurate, your response will not hold up through these probes. If you have a spouse or friend that can pose as your interviewer, it is very helpful to practice answering open-ended behavioral questions. The first ten sample questions, or some variation of them, are particularly common and important to anticipate.

- Describe a situation where have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do.
- Describe a complex project or assignment you have had and your approach to completing it.
- Tell me about an occasion where you needed to work with a group to get a job done. What were the challenges and difficulties and how did you face these?
- Describe a situation when you or your team was in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a person who did things very differently from you. How did you get the job done? Would you work with that person again if given the choice?
- Tell me about a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed. What did you learn from that failure?
- Think about a difficult boss, professor or other person. What made him or her difficult? How did you successfully interact with this person?
- Describe a time when you successfully persuaded others to do something or to see your point of view.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.

- Tell me about the riskiest decision that you have made. What were your considerations in making that particular decision?
- Describe your three greatest accomplishments to date.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you proceed?
- Can you tell me about a complex problem that you solved? Describe the process you utilized.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split-second decision.
- Provide an example of a bad decision that you made and describe what you learned from it.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem. What did you learn from that mistake?
- Tell me about a challenge that you successfully met.
- Describe a situation when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Please tell me about one or two unpopular decisions you have made. What were the positive and negative outcomes of those decisions?
- What leadership positions have you held? Describe your leadership style. What elements of your leadership style have you changed or eliminated once you learned that these aspects were not successful?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give an example of when your persistence had the biggest payoff.
- How have you most constructively dealt with disappointment and turned it into a learning experience? Please give me a concrete example in your life.
- Tell me about a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Describe a situation in which you effectively developed a solution to a problem by combining different perspectives or approaches.

When answering behavioral questions, avoid the pat answers that interviewers are adept at spotting. For example, do not try to portray yourself as a person that never makes mistakes or as a person whose only failings are that you work too much, are too dedicated, too loyal, etc. Be honest about your mistakes since the experienced interviewer will be looking for "progress" and "growth," not perfection. However, do give an example of how you learned from your mistake and how that experience has benefited you in the end.

Be concise. Limit your initial response to a question to no more than two minutes and allow the interviewer to probe for more information with additional questions. Remember the acronym "**SOAR**" to frame your responses.

- **S**ituation—Briefly explain the problem, challenge or situation.
- **O**bjective/Obstacles—Describe your goals and the obstacles to achieving them.
- **A**ctions—What actions did you pursue and why? Focus on your individual efforts and contributions, but be sure to acknowledge teamwork and collective outcomes appropriately.
- **R**esults—What were the results of your actions and how did you assess these outcomes? What did you learn from this experience and how has it influenced you?