

# Behavior-Based Interviews

Given the cost of hiring today, employers want to increase their chances of selecting the right person for a job. It is not enough to hire a person based solely on what the employer *thinks* the candidate can do. The interviewer needs objective, fact-based selection criteria to help in determining if a candidate can deliver the expected results.

The basic premise of behavior-based interviewing is simple: **the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation.** Behavioral interviewing differs from traditional interviewing in that it focuses on the candidate's previous jobs or experiences and delves into how he or she handled different situations, including successes and failures. Behavior-based questions ask: **"What did you do when?"** not **"What would you do if?"**

Organizations using behavior-based interviewing identify the behaviors important to the job. A structured list of questions are developed based on the critical skills or traits required. All candidates are asked the same questions. The candidate's responses to behavior-based questions help to determine if he or she has the skills and characteristics necessary to succeed in the position.

## The Interview Format

The format of the behavioral-based interview is similar to a traditional interview. It includes the following stages:

**Introduction or warm-up.** The introduction is the ice-breaking portion of the interview. The interviewer sets the tone by attempting to establish a positive atmosphere and put you at ease. He or she may preview what will occur during the interview.

It is important to present a friendly, positive attitude. Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake after the interviewer extends his or her hand and be sure to maintain eye contact.

**Body.** The body of the interview includes a question-and-answer period. The interview-

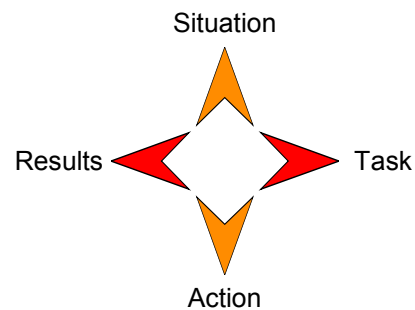
er usually provides additional information about the position or organization. Then he or she asks questions that will help to determine how your qualifications match the position's requirements. The interviewer is also evaluating how you handle yourself, including your self-confidence, communication skills, maturity, and motivation level. During this stage, you have an opportunity to ask questions that help you determine if the position, organization, and work environment meet your career goals and needs.

**Close or wrap-up.** The interviewer explains the next steps in the hiring process. Be sure to thank the interviewer for his or her time and consideration, and indicate your sincere interest in the position.

## The STAR Approach

The **STAR** approach is an effective method for answering behavior-based interview questions. You can use any part of your past as an example — classes, projects, paid work experiences, volunteer work, activities, hobbies, and/or family life. In responding to an interview question, you give an example of an experience you have had and describe your performance in the situation. Specifically, you focus on:

- S** the situation you were in
- T** the task or problem for which you were responsible
- A** the specific action you took
- R** the results of your actions



## Examples of the STAR Approach

The following two scenarios provide examples of how to use the STAR approach in responding to behavioral-based questions:

### Question 1:

Tell me about a project you initiated that produced a big payoff for a campus organization or employer.

### Response:

**Situation:** Advertising revenue was falling off for the Clarion Call and a few long-term advertisers did not renew contracts.

**Task:** To convince long-term advertisers to renew their contracts, and therefore, increase advertising revenue.

**Action:** I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of Call circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set up a special training session between the account reps and a marketing professor to discuss competitive selling strategies.

**Result:** We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for weekly ads and increased our new advertisers by 20% over last year.

### Question 2:

Describe a time when you had to display leadership in a crisis situation.

### Response:

**Situation:** I was a resident assistant for a wing of 30 females. One evening one of the women living on the wing was involved in a car accident and was taken to the local hospital.

**Task:** To assist the area coordinator with an emergency situation.

**Action:** While the A.C. called the student's parents, I made arrangements for them at a local hotel. I then called an emergency meeting to inform the residents of the wing. I packaged a bag for the student and went to the hospital until the parents arrived.

**Results:** Her parents expressed their appreciation for my assistance by writing a letter to the Director of Residence Life. At the end of the academic year, I received the "Best RA" award.

## Behavior-Based Questions

Behavior-based questions usually begin with such words as:

- "Tell me about a time when..."
- "Give me an example of your skills in..."
- "Why did you...?"

Realize that the interviewer is more interested in the process than in the details of your stories. What was the reasoning behind your actions? Why did you behave the way you did? What skills did you use?

As with any interview, you should always be prepared. Use the following questions to begin thinking of your past experiences and accomplishments and how they relate to the types of positions in which you're interested.

### Communication Skills

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion successfully to convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have completed.
- Describe for me a time when you found it necessary to tactfully but forcefully say things that others did not want to hear.
- Tell me about a time when your listening skills really paid off for you.

### Decision Making/Problem Solving

- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give an example of a decision that you made that turned out to be a mistake.
- Give an example that illustrates your ability to make tough decisions.
- Describe an instance when you used good judgment in developing a practical solution to a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you had to make an unpopular decision.
- Tell me about a time when you "blew it." How did you resolve the situation?

- Give me an example of a situation where you sought out a problem to solve because it represented a challenge for you.

**Goal Orientation/Motivation**

- Tell me about an important goal which you set for yourself and your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a road block that prevented you from accomplishing a goal and how you overcame it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a project you initiated that produced a big payoff for a campus organization or employer.
- Tell me about a time when you were dissatisfied with how you performed. What did you do about it?
- Tell me about a time when at the end of your work day there were still a lot of tasks undone.
- Describe a time when you felt most satisfied about something you accomplished.
- Describe a situation that you initially thought you could handle alone, and soon realized you were over your head.
- Your supervisor left an assignment in your “in” box and then left town for a week. Now you can’t reach him and you don’t understand the assignment. What do you do?
- Give me an example of a time, at either work or school, where you had to deal with unreasonable expectations of you.

**Leadership**

- Describe a time when your example served as a model for others.
- Describe the most outstanding leader you have ever worked with and how you are similar to this person. How are you different?
- Give an example of your ability to build motivation in your co-workers, classmates, or committees.

**Planning/Organizing/Time Management**

- Tell me about a situation where you have had to meet a deadline and how you accomplished your task.
- Describe a time when you got seriously delayed in completing a project.

- Tell me about a time at work, when you were accountable for the completion of a very important project or task.
- Tell me about an occasion where several things were asked of you at once. How did you plan to meet those demands? What did you do to ensure everything got done?
- Explain the steps you have taken to organize a meeting or activity.

**Team Orientation/Working with Others**

- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- Tell me about the time when you were most successful in leading a group toward accomplishing an important goal.
- You are a member of a team working on an important project. Three members are working very hard, one member is hardly working. Without this person, the project will never be finished on time. What do you do?
- Tell me about a time when you helped a peer or co-worker with learning a new task or solving a problem.
- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual you have ever had to work with. What did you do?
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with someone who you felt was dishonest.

**Conflict Resolution**

- Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a disagreement among members of a group.
- Describe a time when you used your interpersonal skills effectively to resolve a problem with an irate person.
- Give me an example of a time when you have been open to others’ ideas, even when they conflicted with your own.
- Describe a situation where you were criticized. What was your initial reaction and how did you handle the criticism?
- Describe for me a situation where you discovered your work was not up to your supervisor’s expectations. What did you do about it?

## Career-Specific Questions

Examples of behavior-based questions for specific Clarion majors are listed below:

### Accounting

Having a sound understanding of accounting basics is essential. Tell me about a time when you used your skills to the best of your ability.

### Communication

Think of a situation when the customer wanted something different than what you thought. Tell me the scenario and what you did to handle the situation.

### Computer Science

Describe a time when you had to revise a program in order to make it more efficient.

### Education

Think of a young person who was your biggest challenge. What was that challenge? How did you approach the challenge?

### English

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

### Management

Without naming the individual, look back over your past work experiences. Tell me about one of your previous supervisors who was the most challenging to work for. How did you deal with that person, and what have you learned from that experience that you feel will make you a better manager?

### Marketing

We know that establishing new client contacts is an important part of any sales or marketing position. What methods would you use, or what ideas do you have, for establishing new client contacts?

### Mathematics

Tell me about a time when you helped a peer with learning a new task or solving a problem.

### Psychology/Sociology

In this field, we often must deal with very emotional situations. Recall your last ex-

perience; tell me how you felt and what you did in the situation.

## Preparing for Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interview questions are often difficult to answer without some prior thought. Listed below are several tips that should help you become an effective interviewee:

**Analyze the employer's needs.** Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for a position and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. You should review a position description and employer information to assess what knowledge, skills, and behaviors the employer is seeking.

**Analyze your own background.** Recall your past experiences and accomplishments (in the classroom, activities, and work). Be prepared to discuss the specific skills, behaviors, and personal characteristics needed for each situation. Rehearse your answers so that you can recount them vividly and concisely.

**Quantify your results.** Employers like to hear numbers. Instead of saying, "I supervised workers," say "I supervised ten employees." Numbers, percentages, and amounts give more meaning to your description.

**Identify your top selling points.** Be sure to highlight your most important qualifications for the position. Why should you be hired for this position? Once you have a list of your strongest skills, use the STAR approach for describing each qualification.

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 7/2015



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