

## What is Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral Interviewing is the typical style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is this: *the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation*. It focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. Traditional interviewing questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

## Critical Points About Behavioral Interviewing

- Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are looking and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. To assess which skills the employer seeks, review employer literature, speak with alumni, family and friends who work for the employers, and listen carefully during the organization's information session.
- Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely.
- Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks.
- During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them about the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. Your answer must contain these three steps (situation, activity, result or "**SAR**") for optimum success.
- Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated SAR stories) during the interview.
- It is helpful to frame your answer as a story that you can tell. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. They refer to this as "digging a well." The interviewer will sometimes ask you open ended questions to allow you to choose which examples you wish to use. When a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, he/she will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person." or "Lead me through your decision process."
- Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level or authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then?
- Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service and work experience. In addition, you may use examples of which you may be especially proud such as running a marathon, exhibiting paintings in an art show, climbing all the Adirondack High Peaks, designing a web site, biking across the country, etc.

## Examples of an SAR Answer

**Situation:** During my Public Relations internship, I noticed that attendance at community events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years.

**Action:** I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

**Result:** We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year.

### A Complete SAR Story:

*Right before Thanksgiving break, most of my house mates had gone home for the weekend break. I received a call that one of my house mates had been involved in a car accident. I volunteered to go the hospital to be with him and then called his parents. I also made arrangements for them to stay at a nearby hotel when they arrived. They were pleased I had taken time from my own weekend to help them. My house mates congratulated me for keeping a cool head, going above and beyond, and handling the situation. I've since decided to volunteer on the campus ambulance service.*

## Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

These are often difficult questions to answer on the fly. Jot down examples of stories in your past that you would use to answer these questions. Careful preparation is the key to an effective behavioral interview. Setting up a mock interview with the Career Services staff is an excellent way to practice.

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
  - Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
  - Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgement and logic in solving a problem,.
  - By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
  - Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
  - Give me an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
  - Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communications skills in order to get an important point across.
  - Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
  - Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
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