

## OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

### BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

Behavioral interviewing is a common practice during the hiring process. This type of interview is based on the idea that the best way to predict your future performance is to examine your past and present performance in similar situations. Interview questions focus on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that are job-related.

In behavioral interviews, employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are hiring and ask specific questions to determine whether the candidate possesses such skills.

#### PREPARING FOR BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

When preparing for a behavioral interview, first identify the job competencies that a given employer seeks by thoroughly reviewing the job description. Focus on the competencies listed in the qualifications section and develop specific examples of when you have demonstrated such competencies in your past experiences. Also, review the job responsibilities and develop specific examples of when you have performed similar tasks in current or past roles.

#### ANSWERING BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Behavioral questions often contain phrases such as “Tell me about a time...” or “Give an example...” When asked such questions, first internally note which competency or skill the employer may be seeking (hint: it may be more than one), ask for clarification if necessary, and use the **SAR Method** (also referred to as STAR or PAR method) to convey specific situations, actions, outcomes and results.

- **Situation:** Describe a specific, recent **situation**/task/problem (it is best if it is relevant to the work you are seeking).
- **Action:** Detail your behavior or the **actions** you took to address and/or resolve the situation (be sure that your role is clear and significant – focus on what YOU did vs. the team/group).
- **Result:** Share the outcome or the **results** of the situation.

It is imperative that you practice your answers in order to provide a detailed yet concise response while eliminating irrelevant details and avoiding rambling.

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. Also, be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then? What did you learn?

Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated four employees."

Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering behavioral questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past few years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways; use examples from past internships, classes, extracurricular activities, team involvements, volunteer work and work experience. However, try to use work-related examples as often as possible, as past work-related behaviors are strong indicators of future work-related behaviors.

## **BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS BY COMPETENCY**

### ***Adaptability***

- Tell us about a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?
- What do you do when priorities change quickly? Give one example of when this happened.
- How have you adjusted your style when it was not meeting given objectives and/or people were not responding appropriately?
- What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give an example.

### ***Analytical Thinking***

- Describe a project or situation which best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?
- Tell me about a time when you needed to develop and use a detailed procedure to successfully complete a project.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- How did you go about making the changes (step by step)? Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation. What kind of thought process did you go through? What was your reasoning behind your decision?

### ***Attention to Detail***

- Tell me about a job or setting where great attention to detail was required to complete a task. How did you handle that situation?
- Tell me about your experience in past jobs that required you to be especially alert to details while doing the task involved.

### ***Communication***

- Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively "read" another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their individual needs or values.
- Describe a situation when you were able to strengthen a relationship by communicating effectively. What made your communication effective?
- How do you go about explaining a complex technical problem to a person who does not understand technical jargon? What approach do you take in communicating with people?

- What kinds of communication situations cause you difficulty? Give an example.
- Tell me about a time when you and your current or previous supervisor disagreed but you still found a way to get your point across.
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- What challenges have occurred while you were coordinating work with other units, departments, and/or divisions? How did you address these challenges?
- What are the most challenging documents you have created? What kinds of proposals have you written?

### ***Conflict Resolution***

- Describe a situation where you had to use conflict management skills.
- Give me an example of a time when a company policy or action hurt people. What, if anything, did you do to mitigate the negative consequences for people?
- How do you typically deal with conflict? Can you give me an example?
- Describe a time when you had to cope with the resentment or hostility of a subordinate or co-worker.

### ***Client Relations/Customer Service***

- How do you handle problems with clients? Give an example.
- How do you go about establishing rapport with a client? What have you done to gain their confidence?
- What have you done to improve relations with your clients?
- How do you define quality customer service? Give an example of a time you provided that type of service.
- Give an example of one of your customer service success stories.
- How have you handled demanding clients?
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to deal with a client who was upset and/or dissatisfied with your work. How did you handle that situation?
- Describe your methods of assessing client needs.

### ***Decision Making***

- Discuss an important decision you have made regarding a task or project at work. What factors influenced your decision?
- Tell me about a time where you made a poor decision. What happened? What did you learn?
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give an example of a time when there was a decision to be made and procedures were not in place.
- When was the last time you made a key decision on the spur of the moment? What was the reason and result?
- How did you go about deciding what strategy to employ when dealing with a difficult client?
- How do you involve your manager and/or others when you make a decision?
- In a current job task, what steps do you go through to ensure your decisions are correct and effective?

- Tell me about a time when you had to defend a decision you made even though other key decision-makers were opposed to your decision.
- On many occasions, managers have to make tough decisions. What was the most difficult one you have had to make?

### ***Diversity Inclusion***

- Give a specific example of how you have helped create an environment where differences are valued, encouraged and supported.
- Describe a challenge you've had working on a diverse team.
- Tell me about a time that you successfully adapted to a culturally different environment.
- Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a wide variety of people by accepting and/or understanding their perspective.
- What have you done to further your knowledge and understanding of diversity? How have you demonstrated your learning?
- What measures have you taken to make someone feel comfortable in an uncomfortable or hostile situation?

### ***Evaluating Alternatives***

- Tell me about a time when you had a number of alternatives from which to choose. How did you go about choosing one? How did you assemble the information? How did you review the information? What process did you follow to reach a conclusion? What alternatives did you develop?

### ***Initiative***

- Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.
- What changes did you initiate and implement at your most recent place of employment?
- Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective in prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule.
- Tell me about the last time that you undertook a project that demanded a large amount of initiative.
- There are times when we work without close supervision or support to get the job done. Tell me about a time when you found yourself in such a situation and how things turned out.
- Give me an example of when you took a risk to achieve a goal. What was the outcome?

### ***Interpersonal Skills***

- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with him/her.
- It is very important to build good relationships at work, but sometimes it doesn't always work. Tell me about a time when you were not able to build a successful relationship with a difficult person.
- Tell me about a time when you built rapport quickly with someone under difficult conditions.
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships? Give examples of how you made these work for you.

- Are you familiar with the term "active listening"? How would you define it? What would clients/supervisors/coworkers say regarding how often and how effectively you use active listening?

### ***Innovation***

- Can you think of a situation where innovation was required at work? What did you do in this situation?
- Describe a time when you came up with a creative solution/idea/project/report to a problem in your past work.
- Describe something that you have implemented at work. What were the steps used to implement this?
- Sometimes it is essential that we break out of the routine, standardized way of doing things in order to complete the task. Give an example of when you were able to successfully develop such a new approach.
- Tell us about a suggestion you made to improve the way job processes/operations worked. What was the result?
- There are many jobs that require creative or innovative thinking. Give an example of when you had such a job and how you handled it.
- What innovative procedures have you developed? How did you develop them? Who was involved? Where did the ideas come from?

### ***Integrity***

- We work with a great deal of confidential information. Describe how you have handled sensitive information in a past work experience. What strategies did you utilize to maintain confidentiality when pressured by others?
- Give examples of how you have acted with integrity in your job/work relationship. If you can, tell about a time when your trustworthiness was challenged. How did you react and/or respond?
- On occasion, we are confronted by dishonesty in the workplace. Tell me about such an occurrence and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a specific time when you had to handle a tough problem which challenged fairness or ethics

### ***Introducing Change***

- Have you ever had to introduce a policy change, new idea, or procedure to your work group? How did you do it?
- Have you ever met resistance when implementing a new idea or policy with a work group? How did you deal with it? What happened?

### ***Leadership***

- Tell me about a time when you've shown leadership and influenced outcomes even when you had no official authority.
- Give an example of your ability to build motivation in your co-workers, subordinates at work, classmates, or peers on a volunteer committee.

- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?
- Have you ever been a member of a group where two of the members did not work well together? What did you do to get them to do so?
- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? Describe how you handled it? What was the outcome?

### ***Motivation***

- How would you define "success" for someone in your chosen career?
- Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past. Were you successful? Why?
- What have you done to further your own professional development in the past five years?

### ***Multitasking***

- How many projects do you work on at once? Please describe.
- Which of your jobs had the most rapid change? How did you feel about it? How did you adjust?

### ***Negotiating***

- Describe the most challenging negotiation in which you were involved. What did you do? What were the results for you? What were the results for the other party?
- Describe a situation where you had to negotiate with someone. How did you feel about this? What did you do? How did you prepare for it? How did you present your position? How did you resolve it? What was the most difficult part?

### ***Organization/Planning***

- Give me an example of a project that best describes your organizational skills.
- What have you done in order to be effective with your organization and planning?
- What do you do when your time schedule or project plan is upset by unforeseen circumstances? Give an example.
- If I were to talk with administrative assistants and/or supervisors you have had in the past, how would they describe your strengths and weaker points with respect to personal organization, communications, attention to detail, and planning?

### ***Management***

#### ***Performance Management***

- Give an example of a time when you helped a staff member accept change and make the necessary adjustments to move forward. What were the skills that you used?
- How do you handle performance reviews? Tell me about a difficult one.
- Tell us about a specific development plan that you created and carried out with one or more of your employees. What was the specific situation? What were the components of the development plan? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you had to take disciplinary action with someone you supervised.
- Tell me about a time when you had to tell a staff member that you were dissatisfied with his or her work.
- When do you give positive feedback to people? Tell me about the last time you did.

- Give an example of how you handle the need for constructive criticism with a subordinate or peer.
- Have you ever had a subordinate whose performance was consistently marginal? What did you do?
- How do you evaluate the productivity/effectiveness of your subordinates?
- How do you get data for performance reviews?
- How do you keep track of what your subordinates are doing?

### ***Motivating Others***

- How do you get subordinates to produce at a high level/work at their peak potential? Give an example.
- Give an example of how you have been successful at empowering either a person or a group of people so that s/he or they could accomplish a task.

### ***Delegation***

- Do you consider yourself a macro or micro manager? How do you go about delegating work?
- What was the biggest mistake you made when delegating work? The biggest success?
- How do you manage cross-functional teams?

### ***Employee Development***

- Tell me about a training program that you have developed or enhanced.
- How do you coach an employee in completing a new assignment?
- What have you done to improve the skills of your subordinates? Give an example.

### ***Personal Effectiveness/Self-Assessment***

- Tell me about a recent job or experience that you would describe as a real learning experience.
- Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for an error and were held personally accountable.
- Tell me about a time when your supervisor criticized your work. How did you respond?
- Tell me about a time when you were under extreme pressure on the job and how you handled it.
- When you have been made aware of, or have discovered for yourself, a problem in your work performance, what was your course of action? Can you give an example?
- Can you recall a time when you were less than pleased with your performance?
- If there was one area you've always wanted to improve, what would that be?
- In what ways are you trying to improve yourself professionally?
- What has been your major work-related disappointment? What happened and what did you do?
- What do you consider to be your professional strengths? Give me a specific example using this attribute in the workplace.
- What goal have you set for yourself that you have successfully achieved?
- What was the most useful criticism you ever received?
- If I looked at development suggestions from your evaluations at prior employers, what would I find?
- Tell us about setbacks you have faced. How did you deal with them?

### ***Persuasion***

- Describe a situation in which you were able to successfully influence the actions of others in a desired direction.
- Describe a time when you were able to convince a skeptical or resistant client to purchase a project or utilize your services.
- Have you ever had to persuade a peer, manager, or group to accept an idea that you knew they would not like? Describe the resistance you met and how you overcame it. What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you used your leadership ability to gain support for what initially faced strong opposition.
- Tell me about a time when you had to convince someone in a position of authority to accept your ideas. What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you used facts and reason to persuade someone to accept your recommendation.

### ***Political Savvy***

- Describe the most difficult, challenging, or frustrating company political situations you have faced.
- Tell me about a time that your awareness of company political forces affected your performance?
- What is the most competitive situation you have experienced? How did you handle it? What was the result?

### ***Presentation***

- How do you prepare for a presentation to a group of technical experts in your field?
- How would you describe your presentation style?
- Tell us about the most effective presentation you have made. What was the topic? What made it difficult? How did you handle it?
- What kinds of oral presentations have you made? How did you prepare for them? What challenges did you have?

### ***Problem-solving***

- Have you ever been caught unaware by a problem or obstacles that you had not foreseen? What happened?
- Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Some problems require developing a unique approach. Tell about a time when you were able to develop a different problem-solving approach.
- Tell me about a time when you identified a potential problem and resolved the situation before it became serious.
- When was the last time you were in a work-related crisis? What was the situation? How did you respond?

### ***Project Management***

- Describe how you develop a project team's goals and project plan.
- Describe a complex challenge you have had coordinating a project.
- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- Using a specific example of a project, tell how you kept those involved informed of the progress.

### ***Sales Ability***

- Describe how you prepare for a sales call with a new client.
- How do you go about making cold calls?
- How have your sales skills improved over the past three years?
- Tell me about your most difficult sales experience.
- Tell me about your sales volume over the past three years. What have you done to influence it?

### ***Setting Goals***

- What company or departmental goals have you developed in your past roles? Which ones have you reached? How did you reach them? Which have you missed? Why did you miss them?
- What were your annual performance goals at your most current employer? How did you develop these goals?

### ***Sound Judgment***

- Describe a situation when you had to exercise a significant amount of self-control.
- When have you had to produce results without sufficient guidelines? Give an example.

### ***Strategic Planning***

- Describe what steps you have followed or methods you have used to define a vision for your unit or position.
- How do you see your job relating to the overall goals of the organization?
- In your current or former position, what were your long and short-term goals?
- Tell us about a time when you anticipated the future and made changes to current responsibilities and operations to meet future needs.

### ***Stress Management***

- How do you react when faced with constant time pressure? Give an example.
- People react differently when job demands are constantly changing. How do you generally react?
- What kind of events cause you stress on the job?
- What was the most stressful situation you have faced? How did you deal with it?

### ***Teamwork***

- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the end result?
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What would you have done to prevent this?
- Describe the types of teams you've been involved with. What were your roles?
- Describe your leadership style and give an example of a situation when you successfully led a group.
- Give an example of how you have been successful at empowering a group of people in accomplishing a task.
- Give an example of how you worked effectively with people to accomplish an important result.
- Have you ever been a project leader? Give examples of problems you experienced and how you reacted.
- Have you ever been in a position where you had to lead a group of peers? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever participated in a taskforce? What was your role? How did you contribute?
- Tell us about a time when you had to work on a team that did not get along. What happened? What role did you take? What was the result?
- Tell us about the most difficult challenge you faced in trying to work cooperatively with someone who did not share the same ideas? What was your role in achieving the work objective?
- Tell us about the most difficult situation you have had when leading a team. What happened and what did you do? Was it successful? Emphasize the "single" most important thing you did.
- Tell us about the most effective contribution you have made as part of a task group or special project team.
- Think about the times you have been a team leader. What could you have done to be more effective?
- What is the difficult part of being a member, not leader, of a team? How do you handle this?
- What role have you typically played as a member of a team? How did you interact with other members of the team?
- When working on a team project have you ever had an experience where there was strong disagreement among team members? What did you do?

### ***Time Management***

- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give an example.
- How do you typically plan your day to manage your time effectively?
- Of your current assignments, which do you consider to have required the greatest amount of effort with regard to planning and organization? How have you accomplished this assignment?
- How would you assess your effectiveness?