

# Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing works under the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55% predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive.

**Increasing numbers of employers are using behavior-based methods to screen job candidates, so understanding how to excel in this interview environment is a crucial job-hunting skill. Behavioral-based interviewing provides a more objective set of facts in employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interview questions ask you general questions such as “What is your greatest weakness”. Behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works differently.**

In a **traditional job interview**, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear, even if you are not quite truthful. When asked situational questions like “How would you handle XYZ situation?” you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know, after all, if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would?

In a **behavioral interview**, it’s much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a story to a behavioral interviewer, they will delve deeper to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer may probe further with “What were you thinking at that point?” or “Tell me more about your meeting with that person,” or “Lead me through your decision process.” If you’ve told a story that’s anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the probing questions.

## Employer Evaluation of Skills/Talents

Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate’s experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant’s potential for success. The interviewer identifies job related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that the company has decided are desirable for each position.

Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. Researching the company and talking to people who work there will enable you to zero in on the kinds of behaviors the company wants. Analyzing the skills and abilities noted in the job description / ad is a great place to determine what they desire.



For example, some of the characteristics that employers look for may include, but are not limited to:

1

Critical thinking

5

Self-confidence

2

Being a self-starter

6

Teamwork

3

Willingness to learn

7

Professionalism

4

Willingness to travel

The employer then structures very pointed questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if the candidate possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: **"Tell me about a time..."** or **"Describe a situation..."** Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

## Preparing for a Behavioral Interview

- Identify 6-8 examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers seek for this role. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half of your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Use recent examples. For example, some organizations, such as Accenture, specifies that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form and / or CAR / SAR / PAR / STAR.

To prepare for a behavioral interview right before you're interviewed, review your resume. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory.



## Your Responses to Behavioral Questioning - Tell Your Story

As a candidate, you should be **equipped to answer the questions thoroughly**. Knowing what kinds of questions might be asked will help you prepare an effective selection of examples. Wherever possible, **quantify your results**. Numbers always impress employers. Remember, many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or – better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

In the interview, **listen carefully** to each question, and pull an example from your experiences that provides an appropriate description of how you **demonstrated the desired behavior**. With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of different behavioral questions.

In the interview, your **response needs to be specific and detailed**. Describing particular situations that relate to each question will be far more effective and successful than responding in general terms. Ideally, you should briefly describe the challenge, the specific action(s) you took to have an effect on the challenge/situation, and the positive result or outcome. **Framing it in a three-step process**, may be called a CAR, SAR, PAR, or STAR statement. We use the CAR format:

C

Challenge (or situation, problem, task)

A

Action

R

Result/Outcome

It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Become a great storyteller in your interviews but be careful not to ramble.