HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is Behavior Based Interviewing?

Behavioral Based Interviewing focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. It is based on the belief that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance. You may use work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, school projects, family life - anything really - as examples of your past behavior. Current employment literature indicates that there is a strong trend toward this type of interviewing.

What Do Employers Evaluate in A Behavioral Interview?

Employers are looking for 3 types of skills:

1. *Content Skills* -- are work specific skills such as computer programming, accounting, welding, etc. These skills are expressed as nouns.
2. *Functional or Transferable Skills* -- are used with people, information or things such as organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc. These skills are expressed as verbs.
3. *Adaptive or Self-Management Skills* -- are personal characteristics such as dependable, team player, self-directed, punctual, etc. expressed as adjectives.

How Are Behavioral Questions Different from Other Types of Interviewing Questions?

There are 3 types of questions typically found in interviews:

1. *Theoretical questions* -- Questions that place you in a hypothetical situation. These questions are more likely to test your skill at answering questions rather than in doing a good job.
   Example: How would you organize your friends to help you move into a new apartment?
2. *Leading questions* -- Questions that hint at the answer the interviewer is seeking by the way they are phrased.
   Example: Working on your own doesn't bother you does it?
3. *Behavioral questions* -- Questions that seek demonstrated examples of behavior from your past experience and concentrate on job related functions. They may include:
   a. *Open-ended questions* -- require more than a yes or no response. They often begin with "Tell me...", "Describe...", "When...”
      Example: Describe a time you had to be flexible in planning a workload.
   b. *Close-ended questions* -- Used mostly to verify or confirm information.
      Example: You have a degree in psychology, is that correct?
   c. *Why questions* -- Used to reveal rationale for decisions you have made or to determine your level of motivation.
      Example: Why did you decide to major in this program at Lewis & Clark rather than a larger university?

Adapted from materials developed by Larry Beck, Ball State University.

How Can I Best Answer Behavior-Based Questions?

During a behavioral interview, 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 from your experiences on your resume 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 should contain these four steps (Situation, Task, Action, Result or "STAR") for optimum success.

The STAR Method

The STAR Technique is excellent in behavioral based interview situations:

Situation: give an example of a situation you were involved in that a positive outcome

Task: describe the tasks involved in that situation

Action: talk about the various actions involved in the situation's task

Results: what results directly followed because of your actions

Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated STAR 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 of 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? What did you learn? 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.

Applying for a job at IKEA

Make a chair and take a seat.

CANARY PETE

STAR Example

STAR	What you need to include:	Interview Question Example: "Can you give me an example of a time when you served as the leader of a group?"
Situation	Briefly describe the situation you were in.	"As part of a communication class, we were divided into groups of four and given a project to complete."
Task	Describe what assignment you were given to complete. You might use examples from your education, work experience, or activities.	"We needed to develop a presentation for an organization in order to increase public awareness of the organization and its services. My group selected a small nonprofit organization that serves homebound seniors."
Action	Actions are activities you engaged in to get the task accomplished.	"During our initial meeting, everyone just threw out ideas and talked a lot, but no was taking charge to keep us focused. So, I stepped in and tried to provide some structure to the meeting and to keep us focused. The other members of the group responded favorably, so from then on I was looked at as the leader of the group. What we ended up doing was developing a multifaceted marketing campaign. Each of us was assigned a specific task each week. I made sure everyone knew what their responsibilities were and checked to make sure they were meeting the deadlines we agreed upon. Two people developed a radio spot; one person developed an ad that could be used in magazines, on billboards, etc., and another person developed a computer presentation."
Results	This is the outcome of the task and action. Whenever possible, stat the results in quantifiable terms.	"We had the opportunity to present our campaign to the managers of the organization. They ended up using parts of our presentation, which ultimately led to a 24% increase in the use of their services over a 3 month period. Also, their name recognition increased by 17% based on surveys completed. Our group also received an award from the marketing club for creativity."

How Can I Prepare for A Behavioral Interview?

Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. Try to get an actual job description. What skills do employers require? Analyze your own background. What skills do you have (content, functional, and adaptive) that relate to your job objective? Identify examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. How can you "tell a story" about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing complete STAR answers and remember that a good story has a beginning, middle and end. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility. Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do when this happened? Before starting the interview process, identify 2 or 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated STAR stories) during the interview. Once employed, keep a personal achievement diary to help document demonstrated performance (STAR stories).

Resources
    http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/behavioral.htm
    http://www.quintcareers.com/sample_behavioral.html

Behavioral Based Interview Question Preparation Worksheet

Under each of the following headings, write down some examples of your using the STAR method:

Teamwork Skills

S	
T	
A	
R	

Technical Skills

S	
T	
A	
R	

Interpersonal & Communication Skills

S	
T	
A	
R	

Leadership Skills

S	
T	
A	
R	

Analytical/Problem Solving Skills

S	
T	
A	
R	

Other:

S	
T	
A	
R	

Other:

S	
T	
A	
R	

Other:

S	
T	
A	
R	

Develop a "story" around these examples to describe your strengths and practice this story with others!