What is behavior-based interviewing?

Behavior-based interviewing centers on the idea that your past performance best predicts your future performance. Behavior-based interview questions are:

- Based on competencies important to a position’s success
- *Behavioral* – ask what you have actually done, versus *theoretical* – ask what you would do.

Knowing how well you performed in the past helps the interviewer decide how you will perform in this new position, and all candidates interviewing for a position can be asked the same questions for consistency.

What is in it for you?

Behavior-based interview questions let you provide information about your actual experiences. This allows you to prepare for the interview so you can answer specific questions about your past performance, rather than be unprepared and have to respond to hypothetical situations.

What is the best way to answer these questions?

- Be prepared
- Plan your experiences to share in advance
- Be truthful

Behavioral questions are open-ended, that is they can’t be answered in two or three words. They start out something like:

- Tell me about a time when …
- When have you or When did you …
- Give me an example of …
- Describe a time when …

You should be able to answer these types of questions with a *specific* example.

Behavioral questions differ from theoretical questions – here’s an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical question</th>
<th>Behavioral question</th>
<th>The difference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What would you do if you had to deal with an irate customer?</td>
<td>Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate customer.</td>
<td>You answer based on your real experience with an irate customer. The interviewer will gain knowledge of your ability to respond appropriately in this situation.</td>
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What does success look like for the interviewer, and for you?

Interviewers want to understand the situation, the specific task, your actions, and the results of your actions. This lets the interviewer know what skills and abilities you bring to the job. You can prepare to answer questions successfully using the **STAR Model**. STAR is an acronym for Situation-Task-Action-Result.
Behavior-Based Interviewing Guide

How can you use STAR?
Use the following table to guide you while preparing answers to behavior-based interview questions. Be ready to answer each question by including all elements of STAR in your response.

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<th>S</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain the situation or</td>
<td>Describe the specific task …</td>
<td>… and actions you took in that situation/task.</td>
<td>Describe the results you achieved from your actions.</td>
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How can you best prepare for behavior-based interview questions?

1. Read the job description, and locate the specific behaviors the employer is seeking.
2. Review your resume. Look for achievements that match the competencies in the job description. Select more recent responsibilities and experiences for your responses.
3. Prepare to answer behavior-based questions like those in the Interview Questions Guide.
   - Identify 6-8 examples of situations/tasks where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills.
   - Think of examples that highlight your best qualities, skills, and abilities.
   - Half of your examples should be positive, such as accomplishments or goals you’ve met.
   - Half should describe difficult situations that started negatively but either you made the best of the situation or had a positive outcome.
4. Select a wide range of examples, including some that aren’t work-related achievements. Think of experiences you have had (e.g., volunteer work, club memberships, party planning, extra-curricular activities) that match the skills and abilities being sought for the position.
5. Then, write down, read aloud, and practice each response, using STAR as your blueprint.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior-based question</th>
<th>Poor response</th>
<th>Good response (using STAR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe a time when you were successful at work due to your ability to communicate.</td>
<td>I attended informal lunch meetings and talked with team members about issues.</td>
<td>My team had communication issues, so I organized informal lunch meetings and facilitated team discussion so we could discuss relevant issues. Lines of communication opened and team morale improved.</td>
</tr>
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Key Points to Remember

- If you have trouble thinking of a work-related experience during the interview, you can use an example from outside of work which is related to work skills and abilities (such as a coaching or volunteer work experience).
- Don’t forget to end with a positive result when answering each question. Think STAR+
- How can you recover from a bad answer to a behavioral based question? Be prepared when the interviewer asks if there is anything else you want to tell him/her about yourself. This is your chance to revisit a skill where you didn’t give a good example. Provide another specific example using STAR, summarize, and thank the interviewer for the opportunity to share another example of your skills in this area.
- Write down examples, prepare in advance, and consider your different areas of expertise.
- Do a practice interview with someone. Have a conversation with someone close to you so can practice out loud. Make sure you ask for honest feedback on your presentation.