

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

There are basically five types of questions that are asked in an interview:

## **Credential questions**

"What is your GPA?" and "How long did you work at Aromas?"

## **Experience questions**

"What did you learn in this class?" and "What were your responsibilities in this position?"

## **Opinion questions**

"What would you do in this situation?" and "What are your strengths and weaknesses?"

## **Unusual questions**

"What kind of animal would you like to be?" or "How many ping pong balls could fit in a Volkswagen?"

The purpose of this type of question is to get past your pre-programmed answers to find out if you are capable of "thinking on your feet." There are not necessarily right or wrong answers.

## **Behavioral questions**

"Tell me about a time when you were on a team and one of the members wasn't contributing as much as the others." Behavioral interviewing is gaining greater acceptance by trained interviewers because past performance is the most reliable indicator of future results.

## **Behavioral vs. Traditional Interviews**

Behavioral interviews are different than traditional interviews in several ways:

- Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details about a specific situation, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about events.
- The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.
- Interviewers will likely take notes throughout this type of interview.

The behavioral interviewer objectively collects and evaluates information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous, similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency. If you are an entry-level candidate with no previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position:

- "Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it."
- "Give an example of when you had to work on a team project."
- "What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"

Follow-up questions will test for consistency to determine if you exhibited the desired behavior:

- "Can you give me an example?"
- "What did you do (or say) then?"
- "What was the result?"

In a behavioral interview, you will notice an absence of such questions as "Tell me about yourself" or "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."

## Typical Categories of Behavioral Questions

- Adaptability: situations that required adapting to new people, situations, and environments
- Communication: situations when applying listening and speaking skills proved beneficial, using persuasion to convince someone to see things your way, demonstrating public speaking skills
- Decision-Making: situations when you were called upon to make important or difficult decisions
- Initiative: situations when you went above and beyond the call of duty
- Interpersonal Skills: situations when you were assertive, dealt with a difficult person, or resolved a conflict
- Planning & Organizing: situations when you prioritized tasks or multi-tasked
- Problem-Solving: situations that required identifying and fixing a problem, examples of steps you took to complete a complex project
- Supervision: situations when you assumed a leadership role involving motivating, disciplining, or providing feedback to team members or subordinates
- Teamwork: situations involving shared projects, group conflict or compromises
- Work Standards or Ethics: situations when you adhered to or challenged rules or procedures

## How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Review the job description, as the behaviors they may ask you to discuss are frequently embedded in the position description or qualifications.
- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to provide details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and end. Be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Do not embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Do not generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

## Example

A possible response for the question, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and one member wasn't contributing as much as the others" might go as follows:

"I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of cardboard. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our meetings or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it upon yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

## Summary

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: the traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is focusing upon past actions.