



Behavioral Interviewing Strategies

OVERVIEW OF BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING:

The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that **past performance is the most accurate predictor of future behavior** in similar situations.

This means that the interviewer is going to ask specific questions about your previous experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities to find out how you behaved under a particular set of circumstances with the assumption that *if you solved a problem one way in the past, you would solve it in a very similar way in the future*. In fact, behavioral interviewing is said to be about 55% predictive of future on-the-job behavior while traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive. (Source: www.quintcareers.com).

Key point to remember:

Always ensure that your answers highlight a positively viewed method of problem-solving as your interviewer will assume that you ALWAYS solve similar problems that way.

Behavioral interviewers chose their questions very carefully in order to evaluate the particular set of behaviors, called critical competencies, that are crucial to a position. Frequently, these competencies can be found on a company's website. Some characteristics Accenture looks for include:

- Critical thinking
- Being a self-starter
- Willingness to learn
- Self-confidence
- Teamwork
- Professionalism

As a candidate, your answers need to be specific and detailed and appropriately highlight the competency the recruiter is seeking to evaluate. If you think of your answers as stories, the successful formula, known as a SAR, PAR or StAR statement, becomes clear:

S: Describe the Situation you faced (or problem) – 25%

A: Describe the Action you took – 50%

R: Describe the Results or outcome – 25%

Reminder:

An employer is considering hiring you – an individual – not a team. Highlight your own accomplishments.

Descriptions of the **situation** need to be specific enough that the interviewer can understand why you made the decisions, solved the problem and behaved the way you did. This is not the time for detailed technical descriptions of industry specific projects or to detail the organizational structure or history of your organization unless they are absolutely critical for understanding the reasons behind your actions. The more similar the situation you describe to one that could occur at your interviewer's organization, the more likely they'll be able to picture you responding positively.

As the interviewer is most interested in how you behaved, roughly half of your answer time should be used to describe your **actions**. Be specific about what you did as an individual and what you did as a member of a team. Talk about your decision making process, the steps that you took, and what your responsibilities were.

The **results** section of the answer is often the most neglected and glossed-over section. However, without positive results or outcomes, a potential employer will never know if the actions that you've just described were effective and successful. Whenever possible, use numbers to quantify your accomplishments.

A trained behavioral interviewer will be listening for each part of the story and will ask more detailed, probing questions about that story that address the specific skills he or she is trying to evaluate. He or she will keep asking for more information about a particular situation or scenario until he or she is fully-satisfied that they know why you acted the way you did and have formed an evaluation of your performance in that particular situation.

STRATEGIES FOR PREPARING FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW:

- 1. Know your own strengths and weaknesses.** Determine the 3 or 4 strongest qualities that you bring to the table that you will want to convey to every employer. Be sure to have stories that show how you're improving your "weakness" areas and have specific results to share.
- 2. Understand the type of job you are applying for.** If you know the key competencies that will be required to be successful at a particular job, it will be much easier to prepare appropriate stories.
- 3. Understand the culture of the company where you are interviewing.** If you know the characteristics valued by a company, you'll be better prepared to identify appropriate stories.
- 4. Prepare your stories.** Outline a minimum of two different stories that illustrate each of the qualities you want to get across to your interviewer. Your stories should be different for each question you are asked so be sure to prepare enough accomplishments. Use examples from various areas of your experience – previous jobs, your KGI program, community events. Many individuals like to use index cards, one story per card, to organize their stories.
- 5. Review your resume.** Each of the accomplishments that you use to illustrate your qualities should be referenced on your resume. If there is something on your resume that doesn't lead to a SAR story and accomplishment, then you may want to reconsider if it belongs there.
- 6. Review your vocabulary.** Make sure that all of your stories include the appropriate buzz-words and terminology for the industry and the position that you are interested in.
- 7. Practice your stories.** You don't want your answers to sound memorized or canned but you do want them to be concise, polished and

Typical Key Competencies

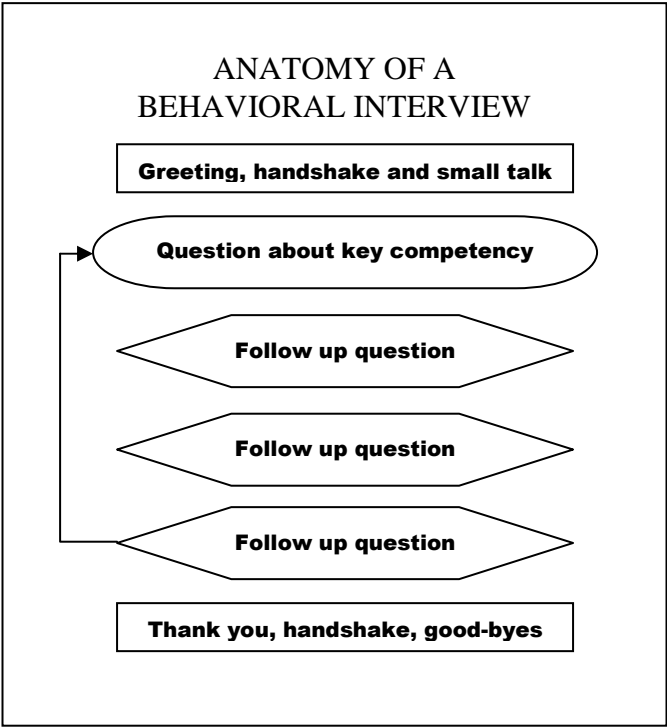
- Adaptability
- Assertiveness
- Control
- Analysis
- Attention to detail
- Decisiveness
- Delegation
- Energy
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Insight
- Focus
- Financial analytical
- Flexibility
- Goal Setting
- Impact
- Independence
- Initiative
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Judgment
- Leadership
- Listening
- Motivation
- Negotiation
- Oral communication
- Organizational skills
- Management
- Planning
- Presentation skills
- Problem Solving
- Rapport Building
- Resilience
- Risk taking
- Sales ability
- Sensitivity
- Strategic analysis
- Supervision
- Teamwork
- Technical knowledge
- Tenacity
- Time Management
- Training
- Work ethic

clear. Answers should be anywhere from 1-3 minutes in length, depending on the complexity of the situation and the actions you took.

- 8. **Review your stories from a negative perspective.** Frequently, a behavioral interview question is phrased in such a way that your natural instinct is to respond with a negative. (i.e. What is the biggest mistake you've ever made?) Turn your answers around so that you can answer these types of questions with your positive stories. (i.e. The situation I learned the most about being an effective team leader was...) Make sure to include your mistake and, equally important, how you learned from it the next time you were in a similar situation.

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTION:

- QUESTION:** Describe a time when you were a member of a team that had to work collectively to complete a project.
- First step:** *What is the interviewer evaluating?* Teamwork / collaboration – working effectively with others outside the formal lines of authority to accomplish a goal or solve a problem.
- Second step:** *What situation best illustrates your skill in this competency?* From your arsenal of stories, select the one that will most clearly address this particular competency. If you have a story that will also highlight another competency important to this particular position or emphasize a personal strength, it will be even more effective. For example, if you are interviewing with a financial services company and you have a story that illustrates your teamwork skills AND your analytical skills, it would be more effective than one that highlights your teamwork skills and your musical abilities.
- Third step:** *Anticipate the follow up questions.* You want to make sure that your answer leads the interviewer to follow up questions that also illustrate your strengths and competencies. The interviewer will probe for the details about why you made the decisions that you did, how you came to your conclusions and more details about the situation that you were involved in. Think about the questions you want your interviewer to ask next – and plan to end your answer in a way that leads to the next question



ANSWER: Since starting at KGI, we've been assigned to study teams for group projects. In one class, when we first started working together, there were a number of

arguments between group members about how the work should be divided and how much time we needed to complete each part. There were also widely varying opinions on what was considered to be quality work. After wasting a number of hours arguing without settling anything, I called a special group meeting at the coffee shop across the street. I gave everyone a piece of paper and asked them to write down why they came to KGI and what they expected to get out of their degree. On the other side, I asked everyone to write down what they thought were the strengths they brought to the team and what areas they most wanted to improve. Then I asked everyone to exchange papers and read them aloud. Once we were able to identify and discuss our individual goals and expectations, we were able to talk about the assignments more objectively. Since then, our group has functioned much more effectively for all of us.

Potential follow up questions from this answer might be:

- How did the other group members feel about sharing this information?
- Did any of the group members resent your leadership in this situation? How did you handle it?
- What are the measurable outcomes of your group's new working style?

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS:

Focus and dedication to the industry:

1. Why did you choose your functional concentration and career?
2. At what point did you make this decision?
3. Specifically, what attracts you to this industry for your career?

Technical and professional knowledge:

1. Sometimes its easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had request help or assistance on a project.
2. Give an example of how you applied knowledge from your undergraduate degree or professional experience to a class project

Teamwork:

1. Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
2. Describe a situation in which you found your results were not up to your professor's or supervisor's expectations. What happened? What actions did you take?
3. Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you talk to about it?
4. Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.

Analysis:

1. What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
2. We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example of how you have done this.
3. Describe a situation in which you had to collect information by asking many questions of several people.
4. In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What steps did you take? How did you prepare yourself?

5. Recall a time from your work experience when your manager was unavailable and a serious problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle the situation?
6. Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project. Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done different if given the chance?
7. What was the most complex assignment you've had? What was your role?

Adaptability:

1. What was the most difficult transition from working full-time to returning for your MBA?
2. Tell of a situation in which you've had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?
3. Give an example of a time when you had to make a decision with limited facts. What was the outcome?

Work Standards and Motivation:

1. Compare and contrast a time when you did work that was above the standard with a time your work was below the standard. Why did you perform better under one circumstance than the other?
2. Describe a time when you were not satisfied with your performance. What did you do about it?
3. What are the standards of success at KGI? What have you done to meet those standards?
4. What kind of supervisor do you work best for? Provide examples.
5. What do you consider to be your biggest failure? What did you learn from it?
6. Describe an ethical situation that you faced. How did you handle it?

Initiative:

1. Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts.
2. Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it?

Planning and Organizing:

1. How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time. Give examples.
2. Tell me about a time when you encountered an unexpected problem on a project.
3. Give a situation where you were unable to complete a project on time. What did you do?

Communication:

1. What has been your experience in giving presentations to small or large groups?
2. Describe a situation where you found yourself working with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?

OTHER RESOURCES:

For more information on behavioral interviewing, review the following websites:

Industry guides: <http://www.wetfeet.com>

Interview question bank: <http://www.pse-net.com/interview/Bank/QuestionBankIndex.htm>

Sample questions and answers: <http://www.pse-net.com/interview/Bank/QuestionBankIndex.htm>

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