

## How to Ace a Behavioral Interview

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*“Tell me about the most difficult project you’ve worked on and how that helped you develop professionally.”*

*“Describe the most creative idea that you’ve implemented to solve a problem.”*

*“Tell me about a time you took initiative and went above and beyond the call of duty.”*

If you’ve ever heard questions like these during the hiring process, then you’ve been part of a behavior-based interview. Designed to reveal more than skills or experience, behavioral interviews operate on the premise that understanding past behavior is the best way to predict future success.

Want to ace your next behavioral interview? This article can help. It will help you understand the theory behind behavioral interviews, the types of questions asked and the best ways to prepare.

### Why Do Employers Use Behavioral Interviews?

In recent years, behavioral interviews have become increasingly popular because they allow companies to make better hiring decisions. Since people do not tend to change their behavioral patterns, behavioral interviews provide a practical approach to screening candidates – examining past behavior to predict future performance. The interviewer is interested in how you *did* behave in the past, as opposed to how you *would* behave in the future.

### What Types of Questions Can You Expect in a Behavioral Interview?

When structuring a behavioral interview, the interviewer first identifies the key behavioral traits a candidate should possess to be successful in the position. Based on these traits, he then develops a list of questions designed to determine whether or not a candidate shows evidence of the desired traits.

For example, if attention to detail is one of the critical traits, the interviewer might ask questions like these:

*“What do you do to control mistakes on the job?”*

*“Describe a situation where you found an error at work and what you did about it.”*

In either case, the interviewer wants to find out if a candidate is able to accurately complete his tasks and check his work for errors.

## **Preparation – The Key to Performing Well in a Behavioral Interview**

Not surprisingly, preparation is the key to acing a behavioral interview. While you cannot predict the questions you will be asked, or have an answer ready for every situation, here are a few valuable tips to help you prepare:

1. **Do your homework.** Before your interview, learn as much as you can about the company and the position available. Pay particular attention to the organization's core values, since several of the behavioral questions will likely relate to them. Try to determine the key behavioral traits of the position. Using clues from the job description, research potential behavioral interview questions that are associated with the traits.
2. **Assemble a list of workplace success stories.** Make a list of key accomplishments (recent examples are best) that demonstrate each of the traits necessary to succeed in the available position. If you are a recent graduate, you may be able to draw upon school experiences (i.e. group projects, research papers, exam situations) for examples. Jot down the main points of each success story, making sure each reflects well on you – even if the outcome itself was not favorable.
3. **Use the STAR technique to ensure each success story has a beginning, middle and end.** In an interview, it's critical to communicate your ideas logically and concisely. The STAR technique can help you create the best answers possible:
  - the beginning of the story should describe a **S**ituation you were in or the **T**ask you needed to accomplish;
  - the middle of the story should recount the **A**ction that you took;
  - the end of the story should review the **R**esults you achieved.
4. **Give answers that are specific and honest.** When relating your success stories, include all of the most important details, citing statistics or other measurable results whenever possible. Above all else, be honest. Behavioral interviewers are trained to probe for details. Even if you get away with embellishing during the interview, doing so may come back to haunt you when the interviewer checks references.

## **List of Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

Hundreds of behavioral interview questions are available online. To help you get started, here is a sample list of common ones:

1. Give me an example from your last job where you had to rely on verbal instructions to complete a task.
2. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
3. We have all had to work with someone who is difficult to get along with. Give me an

example of when this happened to you and how you handled it.

4. Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
5. Tell me about a recent problem you faced at work and how you found the best solution.
6. Have you ever made a mistake on the job? How did you handle it?
7. Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
8. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
9. Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
10. Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.

### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

If you've ever entered a behavioral interview unprepared, then you know how grueling the experience can be. Thinking of relevant work examples while "under the gun" can be extremely difficult.

Don't wind up looking like a deer in the headlights! Rehearse your success stories with a friend. With a bit of practice, you'll be able to use a relatively small number of stories to answer a great number of behavioral questions. Once you can show an employer that you possess the traits necessary to succeed, you'll be well on your way to landing the job you want.