



The behavioral interview

What situation-based questions can reveal about job prospects.

By Marissa Yaremich

As a hiring manager, you've conducted enough job interviews to know that the hundreds of resumes taking over your inbox may not tell you the candidates' full work stories. Those carefully worded resumes do not spell out and validate the applicants' past work behavior, and a traditional interview may yield a recitation of such information. So how to hiring managers best determine who already applied the real-life competencies and work behaviors necessary to function successfully at your company? Behavioral interviews may hold the key.

What is a behavioral interview?

"It is believed that an individual's behavior is subject to repetition, so the majority of the behavioral interviews are based on the assumption that if an interviewee behaved in a certain way in the past, he/she is bound to in the future," explains Erika Walker, a hiring manager for Best Essay Help, an international essay writing service staffing nearly 300 professional writers.

Hiring managers phrase structured behavioral interview questions designed to encourage candidates to leverage those work-related experiences that best exemplify similarly needed skills or behaviors—such as leadership, maturity, personality, work ethic, decision making or management potential, among others. For example, to find out how the interviewee solves problems, you might say: "Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem." To find out how they handle stress, ask them to "Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills." To find out about leadership potential, ask them to give an example of a time they motivated others.

Psychology and preparation

Hiring managers may make the costly mistake of hiring the wrong candidate because they failed to subconsciously divorce themselves from the candidates' charm, humor or good looks during the interview process, says Rom Brafman, a licensed psychologist and co-author of *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*. Unless this is the criteria for the job, he adds, a behavioral interview with prewritten questions defining desired behaviors for the role forces hiring managers to mentally prepare themselves to objectively critique candidates' behavior without natural bias creeping in. "When you notice your own biases coming into the decision process, make sure you call yourself on it," says Brafman.

Michelle Tillis Liderman, founder of corporate training and coaching company, Executive Essentials, agrees. Subconsciously selecting a candidate because he expressed a similar interest in a sport or shares the hiring manager's sense of humor won't help him double the company's gross profit, for example. Hiring managers can avoid this psychological pitfall by preliminarily analyzing the job vacancy to define specific skills. Thus, the subsequently devised interview questions truly

unfurl which candidate best demonstrated those same skills in their past jobs, says Tillis Lederman, also author of *The 11 Laws of Likability* and former hiring manager for Citi.

Once established, it behooves the hiring manager to further eliminate any inherent biases by establishing a behavioral interview that uses a panel of interviewers. In this setup, each interviewer is assigned one or two of the predetermined skills they will solely assess during the interview.

“As a hiring manager, you can still have your own personality and style” that connects with candidates, Brafman encourages. “But think of the behavioral interview questions as a maze. What kind of maze do you need to construct so the right person can make their way through that maze?”

“The most important part of the [behavioral] interview is the preparation,” emphasizes Tillis Lederman. “That means really clarifying what success looks like in a job role.” She suggests this can even mean defining traits a hiring manager does not want a candidate to possess, such as ambition, should the company offer zero room for growth. “As a hiring manager, ask yourself beforehand: What am I really looking for?” she adds.

Formulating questions

Career coach Dorothy Tannahill, CPCC, ACC, says a great way to formulate interview questions is for hiring managers to observe the behaviors and values of their companies’ best employees. “These same people are also continuously solving problems and dealing with business situations that can act as the inspiration for formulating the questions,” says Tannahill, who used behavioral interviewing during her 21 years as a hiring manager at Intel Corp. in Oregon. “The more real life the scenarios are, the better the questions will be.” That means there is no right, wrong or standardized list of behavioral interview questions since each job role requires unique employees skills and traits.

However, Tillis Lederman recommends asking the same predetermined question three different ways to get honest responses since candidates rarely prepare three answers.

For example, she explains, a hiring manager filling a financial role that requires exposure to the press may offer the following trio of behavioral interview-style questions:

1. Tell me about a time in one of your prior jobs when you had to handle the press.
2. Have you ever had to explain your company’s finances with the press during budget season? How did you go about explaining that to the press?
3. What is your weakest skill when it comes to handling the media?

Organizational consultant Annie Farnsworth says the professional trick is not to confuse these questions with scenarios, or what-if questions, since it won’t yield the same insight into past performance. “The structure of the question should be saying to the candidate: ‘Tell me a time when...’ or ‘Tell me about a work experience when you displayed [insert performance or desired skill]...,’” says Farnsworth.

Behavior outside the interview

Some savvy hiring managers may also find assessing a candidate via the behavioral interview translates well for job references. Lou Adler, founder of performance based hiring consultant firm, The Adler Group, says hiring managers can ask candidates' job references similar behavioral questions asked of the candidates during their interviews to gain greater insight. For example, he says, a hiring manager may ask both a candidate and job reference to discuss a time when the candidate displayed motivation to complete a specific project within a set of parameters.

Overall, many hiring managers will not rely strictly on a behavioral interview because it is perceived as time consuming and too structured. However, these experts agree that peppering behavioral interview questions into an interview that also includes traditional and scenario-based questions may prove best in terms of exposing the various qualifications and capabilities of a job candidate.

Five Tips for a Good Interview

- 1. Dress for success.**
- 2. Be on time.**
- 3. Make direct eye contact and offer a firm handshake.**
- 4. Be yourself.**
- 5. Be prepared.**