

# **Behavioral Interviewing**

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## **Introduction**

Behavior-based interviewing has been defined by Business Professor Herbert G. Heneman III of the University of Wisconsin-Madison as, "A thorough, planned, systematic way to gather and evaluate information about what candidates have done in the past to show how they would handle future situations."

The key assumption is that job candidates who have previously demonstrated a particular behavior to address a situation will repeat that behavior in the future when confronted with a similar set of problems. The hiring authority determines which specific behaviors are necessary for success on the job and then seeks out candidates who have shown that they are capable of exhibiting those behaviors.

## **Methodology**

To utilize behavior based interviewing successfully, it is necessary for the human resources recruiter and the line manager to agree to use this method, which will include some form of the following steps:

1. Identifying those knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), behaviors and core competencies key or critical to successful job performance based on an analysis of the job and the incumbents.

Let's let Nancy Glube, Regional Director of Human Resources at BellSouth Mobility, clarify how the system works:

We try to develop questions that focus on the key competencies for the job. Then each candidate will be asked the same questions. We look for consistency of responses and things that are comparable between candidates, things that can be scored. For example, if the job required people to perform multiple tasks and be able to switch between them, we would want to find out if they have had experience like that in a previous job.

2. Determining which behavioral or situational questions elicit the desired behaviors for each particular job.

Questions might be phrased along these lines: "Think of an occasion when you" and then describe a particular situation. Another approach might be, "Can you give me an example of" A follow-up question might be, "What needed to be done about that situation?" And finally: "What was the result?" Questions are designed to address the various themes of behavior exhibited by successful incumbents. Examples sought might address values/ethics, work intensity, relationship skills, problem solving, people management and others associated with success on the job.

### 3. Developing a tailored, structured format for asking the questions.

Typically open-ended, structured questions are developed and incorporated into an interview instrument, and each applicant is asked the same questions. Questions of this nature are best asked toward the end of the interview after the applicant's basic skills and qualifications for the position have been determined. Then the interviewer's task turns to deciding if the candidate can demonstrate and has demonstrated the behaviors that will assure success on the job.

### 4. Devising benchmark responses prior to the interview-examples of good, average and bad answers to the questions.

Usually there is a score-keeping element to this type of interviewing. If the candidate's response to the question matches that given by the best performers on the job, a plus sign or a numerical value is recorded next to the question. The wrong answer gets a zero. This scoring profile is then matched against those of the best performers on the job.

### 5. Training the interviewers to:

- o Take notes.
- o Record actual responses.
- o Omit prejudicial or judgmental comments.
- o Maintain a consistent format for each candidate.

## **Conclusion**

Because of its apparent capability of predicting position success, behavioral interviewing in its various forms is becoming increasingly popular. A fair question might be asked as to what are its limitations. Because each job is unique, it is necessary to determine with line management what specific behaviors are associated with position success. This is a time-consuming process, so it can be justified best when there is a need to recruit many people for the same position. Obviously successful utilization depends on the support of management, skills training in its use, practice and evaluation of its effectiveness.

## **Resources**

For more information, a number of companies provide products, services and consulting on behavioral interviewing techniques. A partial listing includes:

Behavioral Technology, Inc.  
6260 Poplar Avenue  
Memphis, TN 38119  
(800) 227-6855

Development Dimensions International  
1225 Washington Pike  
Bridgeville, PA 15017-2838  
(412) 257-2277 FAX: (412) 257-0614

CJA - The Adler Group, Inc.  
17852 17th Street, Suite 209  
Tustin, CA 92780  
(800) 559-2559 FAX: (714) 731-3952  
WWW.CJA-Careers.Com

Management Team Consultants Inc.  
1010 B Street  
Suite 403  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
(415) 459-4800 FAX (415) 459-5151  
www.interviewedge.com

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and its Employment Committee are a continuing source of information about behavioral interviewing and other employment issues.

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