

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Many interviewers use behavioural style interview questions in their interview question mix. These can be recognized as questions that begin with, “Tell me about a time when...” “Describe a situation in which...” “Give me an example of...” These questions call for you to describe a **specific example** from your previous experience. It is thought that how you behaved in a situation previously is likely to predict how you will behave in the future, so you can expect to encounter these types of questions.

The trick to responding effectively to behavioural interview questions is to provide a specific example, told as a success **story**, that showcases the relevant skill or experience in a focused and descriptive way. Use the **STAR** framework to help prepare your stories.

STAR STRATEGY

Situation: Begin with a brief description of the situation to provide context and ‘set the scene’. Where were you working? What role were you in? When did this take place?

Task: Explain the task(s). What needed to be done/accomplished? Was there a problem?

Action: Describe the specific action you took to complete the task. What did you do? 80% of your response should be focused on the *action* as it demonstrates the skills you utilized.

Result: What was the result? Be sure to wrap up your story with an ending that is positive if possible. If not, explain what you learned from the situation. Many people often forget this.

TIP: The goal is not to write a script and memorize your answers. Instead, use the **STAR** framework to create an outline of your response by jotting down bullets for each of the key aspects of the story. See an example of this strategy in the first sample question & answer below.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Being unprepared – analyze the job posting to understand key job requirements. At the very least, prepare stories for teamwork, problem solving, initiative/leadership; interpersonal skills and coping with challenges. It shows if you prepare in advance, honest.
- Lack of detail – share specific facts that showcase the relevant skill or experience in action
- Going on and on (and on) – keep answers succinct and relevant; use the STAR strategy
- Bad-mouthing past employers (or teammates) – always keep it professional, period.

SAMPLE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Problem-Solving

Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a challenging problem.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Analytical Thinking: uses logic and critical thinking to analyze information and options
- Resourceful: uses tools/resources; creates a plan, act and overcome obstacles
- Creativity: thinks outside the box; applies a new lens to traditional approaches
- Results-oriented: sees the problem as an opportunity not as an inconvenience; focuses on the objective – proactively solving the problem

S/T = Situation/Task

- *During my last co-op work term, I worked as a marketing coordinator and was assigned to assist our Events Manager organize the company's annual charity golf tournament.*
- *The tournament hosts over 70 partners and suppliers not only for a day of golf but a gala dinner and silent auction too.*
- *When I met with my colleague to start planning, she said I would be working on the guest list and invitations to start.*
- *Related to this, she expressed concern about a drop in attendance over the last 2 years and the impact that had on achieving the fundraising goal.*

A = Action

- *I proposed we conduct a quick online survey to all invitees from the past two years.*
- *I suggested this would give us insights into why some didn't participate and for those that did, we would get an idea of what to continue and what to change or improve.*
- *I have experience with survey tools; I had researched them for a class project and made a recommendation for one to use.*
- *I designed the survey questions and, with approval, sent it out. We got a 76% response rate which we were pleased with.*
- *I analyzed the results then presented the findings to my colleague.*
- *Based on the feedback, the change I recommended to address the dip in attendance was to move the event one month earlier in the year from June to May.*

R = Result

- *All in, the survey process was low cost and was wrapped up in just over 2 weeks.*
- *The events team is now sending an online survey following each tournament as a best practice.*
- *I'm also pleased to say that attendance at the golf tournament rebounded and was up 10%.*

Communication

Describe a situation in which you were able to use your verbal communication skills to get your point across.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Validation of verbal communication skills: command of language; ability to express thoughts and ideas clearly and concisely using words; listens and responds accordingly; validate the skills described in the example come across in person
- Engagement: ability to establish rapport and relationship; are you easy to talk to?
- Resourcefulness: use strategies such as examples, metaphors, stories to clarify point

When I was working on my engineering degree, I was active in the Mechanical Engineering Club on campus. In my last year, I took on the role of External Relations Coordinator which meant I reached out to employers and industry partners on a regular basis to organize site tours and networking events. I was reaching out to very busy professionals. I quickly learned how to communicate effectively over the phone, email and in-person. I took care to prepare my messages in advance to ensure they were concise and focused. I developed a simple formula for this that really worked well. I call it the 'IIF' - Introduction, Information and Ask formula. I also became skilled at being able to deliver a compelling 'sales' pitch using the same format. This experience helped me develop into an even more confident and effective communicator.

Creativity/Initiative

Tell me about a time when you took initiative.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Work Ethic: seeks opportunities to solve a problem, make an improvement or contribution
- Service/Team orientation: willing to go the extra mile for the customer or team
- Professionalism: continuously learn and develop skillset; take personal pride in efforts

Right after graduation, I worked as a Project Assistant at a small Engineering Consulting firm on a 6-month contract. I managed a lot of project information and data; everything from costs, budgets, estimates and invoices. I found the existing system for managing this information was not very systematic at all. I knew there had to be a better way. I have very strong Excel skills so I decided to create a series of spreadsheets using Excel that would simplify and streamline how project information would be managed. First, I created a sample then showed it to the engineer I worked with regularly. I explained my plan to expand on the sample and gave him a timeline for completion. He was impressed and asked me to present it at a management meeting. I completed the spreadsheets and did the presentation to claps! I'm happy I was able to make a lasting difference for everyone in the office.

Decision-Making

Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the past year.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Research skills: gathers and analyzes information; utilizes a variety of sources
- Critical Thinking: evaluates options/risk/outcomes, reaches objective conclusion
- Results-oriented: Acts based on best information available and in best interest of customer, team, company; does not delay avoiding conflict or 'getting it wrong'
- Professionalism: Takes responsibility for decision; demonstrates 'lessons learned' attitude

After high school, I decided to work while I determined what career direction I wanted to take. I started work as a receptionist at a building supply company. I enjoyed learning about the business and making connections with the many customers and partners. After only 4 months, I was offered a full-time administrative assistant role with the sales group. I worked closely with the sales team who relied on me to keep things running smoothly, especially since they spent a lot of time out of the office. My good work was recognized again by management, and after a year on the job, I was offered an opportunity to join the sales team as a local sales representative. Here's the difficult decision – to stay on with my great employer and jump into a career in sales or leave the company to go to school. Inspired by my work, I had started to research different business programs. I attended information sessions and networked with a few graduates about their studies and career path. What to do? I spoke to friends, family and a few co-workers to help me work through the pros and cons. In the end, I chose to go take the BBA program at BCIT. It was the right choice for me at the time. Telling my boss of my decision was tough but he was so supportive. The team threw me a nice party and gave me a spa gift certificate to help get me through exams!

Goal-Setting

Give me an example of an important goal you set and how you reached it.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Ambition: has aspiration and drive to achieve; sees the big picture
- Organizational Skills: creates a systematic (and flexible) plan; manages time; ability to prioritize; manages clutter (mental and physical)
- Action-Oriented: takes steps to achieve goals; re-sets goals/plan as needed

When I first started out in financial services, I didn't have a lot of technical knowledge. I thought I would pick it up along the way and I certainly acquired a good foundation in 2 years as a Financial Services Representative. However, I realized I needed to make some changes if I wanted to progress in my career. That is when I decided to pursue a certified financial planner designation. This type of certification often takes two years to complete, but I wanted to complete it in a year, so I could qualify for financial planning positions. I did my homework. I researched the courses I needed to take and created a detailed schedule. I also spoke with a colleague of mine who had gotten her designation on an aggressive timeline and got some tips from her. Thanks to the small goals I had set along the way and the schedule I had created, I was able to get my certification in a year, and with that certification I got the promotion.

Adaptability

Tell me about a time when something you were doing/working on did not go according to plan. What was your role? What was the outcome?

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Change Orientation: accepting of change; ability to cope effectively with pressure
- Resourceful: tries new tools and techniques; seeks alternatives and ways to move forward; asks for help if needed
- Interpersonal Skills: accepts different working styles; solicits feedback; helps others deal with change

In the second semester of my program in my Management Strategy class, we had to do a group project and presentation, and we got to pick our group members. This was my first significant group project, so I picked two friends I had met in a couple of previous classes - even though I knew that they were not particularly hard workers. At the time, I didn't care about that, I just wanted to be comfortable with the people I was working with. I ended up doing most of the project at the last minute and by myself because I couldn't get them to commit. The project and presentation were not very good – certainly not of a quality I was proud of, and our grades reflected it. I learned to be more strategic about choosing team members (when I can) and to set clear team ground rules and expectations at the beginning. In subsequent group projects, I've also learned how to motivate people who are not as enthusiastic as I am.

Interpersonal

Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual and how you dealt with it.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Communication skills: ability to raise concerns in a professional manner
- Team-oriented: fosters healthy relationships; seeks win-win (not win-lose)
- Professionalism: takes ownership; resolves issues proactively;

This example shows how I was able to prevent a potential conflict with a teammate. When I first began working at the community centre as a junior program leader, I was the youngest member of the team. I worked with an experienced team leader who really "knew the in's and out's" of the centre. When I first got there she barely acknowledged my presence, and through word of mouth I discovered that she thought that I was too young and inexperienced to successfully do the job. I focused on doing my job and took every opportunity to make a good impression. I was a very diligent worker and behaved in a professional manner at all times, learning quickly the best way to do things. After about two weeks of the silent treatment from her, she came up to me and told me how impressed she was. She told me that I was doing a good job and that I was learning the ropes quickly. From then on, she took me under her wing and I learned a lot from her. We became good friends and are still in touch.

Teamwork

Tell me about one of your favourite experiences working with a team and your contribution.

What's the 'why' behind this question? The recruiter is looking for competence in/evidence of:

- Team-oriented: thinks and acts 'we' (less 'me'); values diverse perspectives, skills and contributions of all; willingness to collaborate
- Interpersonal skills: ability to create positive working relationships; shows empathy
- Communication skills: tactful and diplomatic; communicates effectively with diverse groups

I was working as an IT Service Desk Technician and we were doing a significant hardware and software upgrade across the company. This involved over 2300 team members across 3 different locations. We had a good plan and a great team, but you can imagine that things didn't always go according to plan. We had to adjust to many unexpected changes and delays and troubleshoot along the way. As a result, we logged a lot of extra hours and did our best to keep things moving forward. I could see and feel that we were burning out. I went to my manager and asked if we could order pizza and pop to celebrate our hard work. My manager really liked the idea and a few of us organized the pizza party. It was just the morale boost we needed at a low point in the implementation. It was so successful, we ended up creating a committee that planned regular fun events.