

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral Interviewing is based on the premise that examples of past behavior are the best predictor of future behavior. Interviewers have identified certain skills and competencies (“critical capabilities”) essential to the position, and will ask you to describe a specific instance in your past related to these qualities. They will use this information to draw conclusions about how you are likely to react should you encounter a similar situation in the future.

Some of the skills and qualities you may be evaluated on include:

- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Initiative/Execution
- Handling Details
- Technical Expertise
- Flexibility
- Communication
- Conflict Management
- Business Acumen
- Achievement/Drive
- Leadership
- Stress Management
- Teamwork

The best approach to take when answering these types of questions is the STAR interviewing approach: **Situation/Task, Action, Result**

**Situation/Task:** give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome or a positive learning experience or describe the tasks involved in that situation

**Action:** talk about the various actions involved in the situation's tasks

**Result:** what results followed because of your actions

It is important to be as specific as possible when formulating your answer. Select ONE specific incident from your coursework/group projects, work experience, or extracurricular activities.

Example: Tell me about a time when you set a goal for yourself and did not reach it.

**Situation/Task:** My first year at Stevens, I received an A in my first calculus class. The following semester I set a goal for myself to get another A in Calc 2. Calc 2 had 2 main determinants of my grade: a midterm and a final. I knew I had to do well on the midterm in order to have any chance of getting my A.

**Action:** I studied for the midterm about the same as in the previous semester, and I had attended all the recitations and did all the homework leading up to the midterm, which is also what I had done in Calc 1. However, Calc 1 was mostly a review of what I learned and high school, and Calc 2 was much more difficult. I was much less prepared than I thought I was, and I did very poorly on the midterm.

**Result:** I realized that I had to take a different approach to studying to salvage my grade. I immediately signed up for a tutor, and also visited the TA on a regular basis to get help. I got an A on the final, which brought my final grade up to a B. I was disappointed because I could have earned an A if I had realized I needed help sooner. However, I'm happy to say that I took the same proactive approach during Calculus 3 and 4, and I got A's in both courses.

## HOW TO PREPARE:

- Think of specific examples of instances in your past when you had to demonstrate the skills and qualities listed above. You can use examples from work, classes/group projects, and extracurricular activities.
- Analyze the position for which you are applying and identify the critical capabilities. Listen carefully in the information session and/or closely read company literature to help you with this analysis.
- Take inventory of your critical capabilities. Do any match? If so, can you remember a time when you demonstrated the use of any of these capabilities? If not, think about how you would react if you encountered that situation.
- Formulate STAR answers based on the critical capabilities that match the position. Integrate technical knowledge into your answer whenever possible. Try to use different experiences for each capability to show that you can learn from many different situations.
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. The interviewer may be interested in HOW you overcame obstacles. Focus on what you learned from the experience or how you would approach the problem differently next time.

- Practice your stories as much as possible, though without memorizing like a script.

While you are telling your story, the interviewer may interrupt and "probe" for more specific information. "Probing" questions may include: "What did you say? What did he/she say? What were you thinking at that point? What did you do? What happened next? Lead me through your decision-making process."

## **SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS**

### **Problem Solving**

- **Sample Questions:** When was the last time you solved a difficult problem that would have significant impact? Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem. 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. Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? How did you go about analyzing the problem? What additional information did you gather? What alternative solutions did you consider? Tell me how you implemented your solution. What was the outcome?

### **Decision Making**

- **Sample Questions:** What was the most difficult decision you have made in the last six months? What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision? Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? What made it difficult? What factors or variables did you consider? What did you decide? What was the result?

### **Initiative**

- **Sample Questions:** Describe your best example of taking the initiative to do something that needed to be done, even though it wasn't really your responsibility. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done. Describe a creative/innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or project.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? What circumstances required you to act? What actions did you take? What impact did your initiative have on the situation?

### **Handling Details**

- **Sample Questions:** Tell me about the most significant project you have worked on in which it was crucial to keep track of details while still managing the "big picture." Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result? What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the project? What skills did you utilize in managing it? How did you make sure the work got done? How did you keep focused on the overall goal of the project while still managing all of the specific parts? How did the project turn out? What feedback did you receive on your management of the task?

### **Flexibility**

- **Sample Questions:** By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments. What kind of supervisor do you work best for? Provide examples.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What were the different types of people you worked with? How did you adapt your behavior accordingly? How did you know that your behavior was effective?

### **Communication**

- **Sample Questions:** Describe a time when you had great difficulty communicating your thoughts clearly to another person or group. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way. Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? What message were you trying to convey? Where did the difficulty in communicating effectively lie? What did you do to get your point across more clearly? What was the outcome?

### Conflict Management

- **Sample Questions:** Tell me about a time when you voiced a concern or disagreement to a co-worker, supervisor, or professor. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** Where did the disagreement originate? What did you say to the other person? What was his/her reaction? What was the outcome of the disagreement? Why was the person difficult? How did you handle that person?

### Business Acumen

- **Sample Questions:** Sometimes it is easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment. Describe a time when you did not have all the information required to get the task done. Tell me about a time when you encountered difficulty in getting something done at work due to corporate "red tape".
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? When did you realize you needed more information? How did you know who to go to for assistance? What was the outcome?

### Achievement /Drive

- **Sample Questions:** Describe a situation in which you believe you were effective in achieving an aggressive goal. Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What caused you to work hard to meet this objective? What methods or skills did you use to meet your goal? What were the results? What feedback did you receive?

### Coordinating/Leading Others

- **Sample Questions:** Tell me about a situation in which you had to coordinate several people to achieve a goal. Summarize a situation where you took the initiative to get others going on an important issue, and played a leading role to achieve the results wanted.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What prompted you to take the lead? How did you go about coordinating and leading the group? How did they respond? What tools did you use to measure the progress of the group? What was the outcome?

### Managing Stress

- **Sample Questions:** Describe your most disappointing experience. How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples. Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** How did you cope? What did you do to move beyond the stress and still get the job done?

### Teamwork

- **Sample Questions:** Can you tell me about an occasion where you needed to work with a group to get a job done? Describe when a group that you were a part of was in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do?
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the situation? Why did the group finally pull together? What was your role in the group? Why did you select that role? What was the outcome?

### Technical Expertise

- **Sample Questions:** Tell me about a time you were effective in putting your technical expertise to use to solve a problem. Provide an example of how you acquired a technical skill and converted it into a practical application. Describe a time where you were required to use a certain technology that you did not know well.
- **Information to Include in Your Answer:** What was the problem? In what ways did you draw upon your technical knowledge to solve it? How did you acquire the necessary knowledge? What was the outcome?