

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways:

- ~ Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.
- ~ Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").
- ~ The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.
- ~ The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.
- ~ You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories.
- ~ Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview.

The behavioral interviewer has been trained to objectively collect and evaluate information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency.

If you do not have much previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position. For example:

"Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it."

"Give an example of when you had to work with your hands to accomplish a task or project."

"What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

"Can you give me an example?"

"What did you do?"

"What did you say?"

"What were you thinking?"

"How did you feel?"

"What was your role?"

"What was the result?"

You will notice an absence of such questions as, "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

- > Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving coursework, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- > Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- > Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.
- > Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- > Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- > Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed account of one event.

A possible response for the questions, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member wasn't pulling his or her weight" might go as follows: "I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything else I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other class. He was not only able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a "B" on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it upon yourself to confront him?" You can see that it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

## **DON'T FORGET THE BASICS**

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospects of a behavioral interview, remember the essential differences between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview. The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for the past actions only. It will always be important to put your best foot forward and make a good impression on the interviewer with appropriate attire, good grooming, a firm handshake, and direct eye contact. There is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.

*(Career Development Guide, a placement manual series publication, 1997-1998)*

### **Behavioral Interview questions:**

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to change things your way.

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgement and logic in solving a problem.

By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.

Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.

Give me an example of an important goal, which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Describe the most significant or creative presentation, which you had to complete.

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

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).