

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioural interviewing is one of the cornerstones of the selection process, and will more than likely be used at interview by both the recruiter and the employer. Whilst the outcomes of a behavioural interview play a key role in assessing an applicant's suitability, we believe that no single process provides all the answers. We advocate the use of a well-rounded selection methodology, including preferential and situational interviewing, reference checking, skills testing against established benchmarks and more. Each of these components provide only one piece of the puzzle; it's important to have the complete puzzle to see what the full picture truly looks like.

Behavioural interviewing, also known as targeted selection, works on the logic that past behaviour will predict future performance. One of the main success factors behind behavioural interviewing is the use of consistent questioning against pre-defined competencies which are important for success in the role. In other words, via a structured and methodical approach, you need to know what makes a good Project Manager, and then you need to assess each applicant against those skills or abilities with the same set of tools in order to compare them in a valid and fair manner.

The desired outcome of any component of the selection process is to find out how the applicant will actually perform in the specific role for which they've applied. Once you have established the key competencies for your vacant role, you can work with your HR team to select one or two relevant behavioural questions for that competency, at the appropriate level of seniority. As a guideline, it is not recommended to ask more than six to eight behavioural questions per interview; if you have more it is advisable to break them up between the initial and secondary interviews.

Some examples of behavioural questions against various competencies are:

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Tell me about a project that has required a high level of attention to detail.

CHANGE

Tell me about a time when you had to adjust quickly to a change in organisational, departmental or team priorities. How did this affect you? What steps did you take to manage this situation?

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Tell me about a time when it has been a challenge to get your point across to a client. How did you persuade them?

CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS

Can you tell me about a time when you have had to deal with a customer who was emotional, angry or distressed. How did you feel? What did you do and what was the outcome?

DECISION MAKING

What were the most difficult decisions you have made in the last 12 months? How did you formulate these decisions?

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Tell me about some of the people who have become successful as a result of your management? What was your role in their development?

NEGOTIATION

Walk me through a negotiation of which you are particularly proud.

PRO-ACTIVITY

Tell me about a time you wanted to change a system or a process in your current role. What did you do? What was the outcome?

SALES SKILLS

Give me an example of when you were successful in identifying and developing business opportunities outside existing business.

TEAM SKILLS

Describe a situation where you wish you had acted differently with someone in your work group. What happened? In hindsight, what do you wish you had done?

TIME MANAGEMENT

What are some of the things that you do to ensure that your time is being used effectively?

WORK ETHIC

Give me an example of when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.

A common mode of response to behavioural questions is the STAR model: STAR outlines the situation, the role the applicant played, and the outcome.

Situation – a brief outline of the situation or setting, and at which company the situation took place

Task – outline what the applicant's role was, and what they had to do

Approach or action – outline how the applicant decided on the correct approach to achieve the outcome

Result – describe the outcomes: what did the applicant achieve and what was the end result?

Things to listen out for:

- Use of the word 'we' can often mean that the applicant was part of a group, and they may personally have had little or nothing to do with achieving an outcome. For example 'Our customer satisfaction results were low, so we implemented a new system which

improved our results by 30%'. Was it the applicant's idea to implement the new system? What role did they play in identifying the issue? Was it their customers specifically whose satisfaction improved, or the company's across the board?

- Inability to provide a strong example. If the applicant tells you they improved their time management skills by only checking Facebook during their lunch break, this is not ideal. If, however, they realised that they were consistently behind with administration tasks and emails, and asked their manager for assistance, and then drew up a weekly planner of all their regular tasks, and allocated time for attending to admin and emails each day, this is a much stronger example, and also demonstrates initiative and autonomy.
- If the example was from a job in 1992. Examples should ideally be from within the last three to five years. Older examples do not provide evidence of the applicant's current levels of energy, responsibility, and ability.
- If the example is from a short-term or contract role. These examples will not typically provide evidence of their ability to demonstrate these competencies on an ongoing basis.

If you don't feel as though you've received a well-rounded enough answer, don't be afraid to probe more deeply, using responses such as 'that sounds interesting, can you walk me through exactly how you came to that decision in a little more detail?'. Or if the example is simply not strong enough, say 'okay, I was actually hoping to hear about something with a little more impact – is there another situation where you used this skill on a larger scale?'

Ultimately you want to have a good understanding of the context of the situation, exactly what role the individual played in achieving the solution, what the solution was, and how it was received by key stakeholders.

Ideally, you will have an established benchmark for each competency, and you will rate each response against those benchmarks to establish an applicant ranking. Benchmarking can be done by taking good and high performers who are currently in the same role, and asking them the behavioural questions you intend to use at interview. These results form the benchmarks for good and high performing applicants.