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# Interviewing for Success – Bring Your Experience To Life!

The Behavioral-based Interview is one of the most common types of employment and graduate school interviews in use today. This interviewing technique focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that are job related. It is based on the premise that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance.

To succeed in this type of interview, you need to bring your qualifications to life by providing specific examples of your skills and accomplishments. How can you do this? Try the **CAR** method for answering interview questions related to your past behavior and performance. The **CAR** model of interview preparation provides you with a systematic way to practice and become familiar with behavioral-based interviewing. The acronym itself is relatively easy to remember:

C – Circumstance

A – Action

R – Results

## *Circumstance*

Describe a situation so that the employer can place himself/herself in your shoes and understand the importance of the event you are relating. For example, **"As advertising manager for Arcadia University's student newspaper, I was confronted with the fact that advertising revenue was significantly decreasing - many advertisers were not renewing contracts."**

## *Actions*

After setting the stage by describing the circumstance, tell the interviewer the specific actions you took to resolve the problem. For example, **"I designed a promotional packet and compared the benefits of advertising in our paper to other advertising media in the area. I also set up a special training session for the account executives to discuss competitive selling strategies."**

## *Results*

PLEASE understand that your interview goal is to demonstrate a results-oriented background. Connect your accomplishments to the position you are seeking. Even if the results didn't turn out as you planned, tell the interviewer what you learned from the experience and what you would do differently next time.

In our example about the advertising revenue, our closing results could be something like the following: **"As result of my efforts in designing a promotional packet and sales staff training, we signed contracts with twenty former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased new advertisers by twenty percent!"**

The **CAR** system allows you to tell the interviewer a "story" (with a beginning, middle, and end) about how you achieved a goal. Use work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, school projects, family-life – anything that would be examples of your past behavior.

# Sample Interview Questions

**Organization and Planning Skills**

- Describe a specific situation which illustrates how you set objectives to reach a goal.
- Tell me about a time when you had to choose between two or more important opportunities. How did you go about deciding which was most important to you?
- Tell me how you normally schedule your time in order to accomplish your day-to-day tasks.
- Describe a situation where you had a major role in organizing an important event. How did you go about it?
- Think about a lengthy term paper or report that you have written. Describe how you organized, researched and wrote that report.
- Give an example of how you organized notes and other materials in order to study for an important exam.
- Describe a time when you reorganized something to be more efficient. How did you go about it?
- Think of a time when you made important plans that were fouled up. How did you react? What did you do?

**Assertiveness and Motivation**

- Describe several work standards that you have set for yourself in past jobs. Why are these important to you?
- Tell me a time when you have experienced a lack of motivation. What caused this? What did you do about it?
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with someone whom you felt was dishonest. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation that made you extremely angry. How did you react?
- Tell me about a time that best illustrates your ability to "stick things out" in a tough situation.
- Describe a time when you motivated an unmotivated person to do something you wanted them to do.
- Give me an example of a time when you were affected by organizational politics. How did you react?
- Give me an example of when someone tried to take advantage of you. How did you react?

**Interaction and Leadership**

- Tell me about an event in your past which has greatly influenced the way you relate to people.
- Give a specific example that best illustrates your ability to deal with an uncooperative person.
- Some people have the ability to "roll with the punches." Describe a time when you demonstrated this skill.
- Tell me when you had to work with someone who had a negative opinion of you. How did you overcome this?
- Recall a time when you participated on a team; tell me an important lesson you learned that is useful to you today.
- Describe an instance when you reversed a negative situation at school, work, or home. How did you go about it?
- Describe a situation which best illustrates your leadership ability.
- Think about someone whose leadership you admire. What qualities impressed you?

**Decision Making and Problem Solving**

- Give an example that illustrates your ability to make a tough decision.
- Tell me about a decision you made even though you did not have all the facts.
- Describe a situation where you have had to "stand up" for a decision you made, even though it was unpopular.
- Describe a situation where you changed your mind, even after you publicly committed to a decision.
- Describe a situation that illustrates your ability to analyze and solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time where you acted as a mediator to solve a problem between two other people.
- Describe a problem that seemed almost overwhelming to you. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time where you have used a creative or unique approach to solve a tough problem.

# *INTERVIEWING*

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## Interviewing for Success

*Purpose of an Interview*:
- An interview is a mutual exchange of information between the employer and the applicant.

*Employers seek to determine*:
- If your education and experience are a good match with the specific job responsibilities.
- If you will "fit" into the organizational environment.

*The applicant seeks*:
- An opportunity to emphasize your abilities and interest in the job.
- To learn more about the job and the organization in order to decide if you would be happy working there.

## Types of Interviews

Informational Interview – conducted by the applicant to learn more about the company or a specific career.
Screening Interview – designed to eliminate less suitable candidates and to narrow the applicant pool.
Stress Interview – creates situations to see how you might handle job-related stress.
Series Interview – consecutive interviews with different people within the same company or organization.
Group Interview – involves the interviewing of several candidates simultaneously.
Board Interview – interview conducted by two or more people at the same time.
Behavioral Interview – asks questions which determine how you handle challenges.

## Preparing for the Interview

- Arrive five to fifteen minutes early.
- Dress appropriately. (See reverse of this document for more information.)
- Bring the necessary items, such as:
  - Extra copies of your resume
  - Reference list with 3 to 5 individual references
  - Work samples that demonstrate skills and abilities
  - Small umbrella (leave in car or hotel room if not necessary)
  - Leather bonded portfolio or notebook
  - Good quality pen and/or pencil
  - Small purse or wallet
- Have clear directions to the interview; understand parking location and needed travel time.
- Know the name and title of the person you are meeting; get the interviewer's business card.
- Research the company and the position; understand what the employer is seeking in a new hire.
- Practice answering questions. Be prepared for illegal or inappropriate questions.
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.
- Send follow-up thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview.

## During the Interview

- Greet the employer with a firm handshake and refer to the interviewer by name.
- Watch your non-verbal communication. Maintain good eye contact and smile appropriately.
- Give examples to back up or provide evidence for your skills and strengths.
- Be alert and attentive. Show enthusiasm for the position and the company.
- If you do not understand the question, ask for clarification. Answer the question asked.
- Emphasize your strong points, showing a match between yourself and the position.
- Know your resume and be able to discuss every aspect.
- Be prepared to answer tough questions.
- Never criticize a former employer, teacher, colleague, or school.
- Follow the interviewer's lead. Do not be uncomfortable with periods of silence.
- Watch your grammar, avoiding overuse of common phrases and "um," "uh," "like, ya know," or "yeah."
- Control potentially annoying mannerisms such as toe-tapping, knee bouncing, or fidgeting with jewelry.
- Avoid discussing salary or benefits during the first interview.
- Be yourself!!

## Appropriate Dress

Generally, conservative and professional dress is the key!

*For women*:

- navy, black, brown or charcoal suit
- single colored, light or pale tone, non low-cut blouse
- polished shoes with low heels
- little or no perfume
- neutral skin tone pantyhose
- simple jewelry & make-up

*For Men*:

- navy, black, brown or charcoal suit
- single colored, white or light tone shirt
- conservative tie of proper length and correctly tied
- polished black or brown shoes
- socks and belt to match shoes
- watch or wedding band are acceptable jewelry items
- no facial hair or conservative and well-groomed if you decide to have it

## Commonly Asked Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should I hire you?
- Why did you choose to interview with our company?
- What can you offer us?
- Where do you want to be in five years?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strength?
- Describe your major weakness and discuss what you are doing to try to correct it?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- What sets you apart from other qualified candidates?
- How might a friend or co-worker describe you?
- What do you know about our company?
- What is most important to you in a job?
- What motivates you to do well?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your ideal job?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability?
- Tell me about your work habits?

## ***Questions to Ask Employers*** - If not answered in company literature.

- How did this position become available?
- What specific responsibilities are required of this position?
- Would you describe a typical day's activities for me?
- What personal qualities or characteristics are important for success in this position?
- To whom would I report?
- How is training, evaluation, and feedback for new employees traditionally handled?
- What are some of the organization's short-term goals? Long term goals?
- What challenges might I face in this position?

## ***Interview Knockout Factors***

- What is the next step in the hiring process? – OR – When do you expect to make a hiring decision?
- Not prepared for the interview; no research has been conducted on the employer.
- Unable to express self and ideas clearly; poor communication skills.
- Failure to provide examples to back up skills and experiences. Did not market self well in the interview.
- Use of clichés or providing ambiguous, general answers.
- Poorly defined career goals; little or no sense of direction.
- Lack of enthusiasm and energy.
- Unprofessional or inappropriately dressed.
- No real interest in the employer.
- Asks too few or poor questions about the job or employer.
- Poor match for position and organization.
- Unhappy personality; disliked former jobs, supervisor, school, teachers, and/or activities.
- Makes excuses during the interview; evasive.
- Only interested in salary or benefits. – OR – Unrealistic expectations of the job responsibilities or salary.
- Lack of confidence or poise – fails to look interviewer in the eye; weak handshake.
- Talks *too* much!