

## **Guide to Behavioral Based Interviewing**

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Behavioral interviewing is a specific methodology used to interview candidates for a position.

### **Why Use Behavioral Interviewing?**

Traditional "gut feeling" interviewing is often a poor predictor of good hires. "Gut feeling" interviewers tend to choose candidates they like, those that are like themselves, or candidates who interview well, rather than the best candidate for the job. Using these types of selection techniques present many problems for organizations – not the least of which is that most new hires selected in this manner likely will not meet your performance expectations. This makes traditional "gut feeling" interviewing a high risk and potentially costly.

Structured behavioral interviewing, however, can dramatically increase your success in hiring the best people. Better hires mean increased productivity, lower turnover, higher morale, and better quality and service for customers. Successful organizations use behavioral interviewing because it:

1. Provides a systematic process.
2. Helps acquire relevant and objective information.
3. Helps protect the organization from costly lawsuits.
4. Provides best match between candidate and job.
5. Reduces training time and lowers turnover.

### **What is Behavioral Interviewing?**

Behavioral interviewing is a structured interviewing strategy built on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance in similar circumstances. For example, if you want to hire someone who has outstanding customer service skills, you might ask this question:

"Tell me about the most difficult customer you ever had to handle. How did you go about it?"

This question asks for a specific example of how the candidate performed in the past that relates directly to how a candidate must perform on the job in the future. Behavioral interviewing allows the interviewer to gather evidence that the candidate possesses the critical capabilities required for successful job performance. It is these critical capabilities, called competencies, that help you identify the very best performers for a given position.

## **Behavioral Interviewing Process Model**

Below is a four-step model that has proven very effective in interviewing and selecting new employees. The four steps include:

- Step 1 - analyze the job
- Step 2 - plan the interview
- Step 3 - conduct the interview
- Step 4 - evaluate candidates

### **Step 1 - Analyze the Job**

The first step of behavioral interviewing involves a number of background activities that require analysis.

*Reviewing the job* involves examining job descriptions, performance standards, and business plans that impact the position. Hopefully this documentation is up to date!

*Developing competencies* involves identifying a list of capabilities and characteristics - the knowledge, skills, abilities, personal style - that distinguish the top performers in the position. In our workshops on behavioral interviewing we walk through the process of developing competencies. People see it does not have to be as difficult or involved as some think.

*Determine mandatory competencies*, those you must have and therefore need to hire for, and those competencies you can develop after hire. The competencies you must have in a candidate will become the foundation for interviewing and selection.

### **Step 2 - Plan the Interview**

This step involves planning the interview process and developing interview questions for all mandatory competencies. Part of planning the interview process involves choosing and preparing for individual or team interviews. Each approach has pros and cons.

The next part of planning the interview is to design directing and probing questions to assess candidates against the mandatory competencies for a position. Directing questions set a direction for a portion of the interview and are designed to assess specific competencies. Typically, they are used to ask a person to describe an actual past situation. Probing questions dig deeper and elicit details. Probing questions can involve asking a candidate for his or her thoughts,

feelings, actions taken, results achieved and conclusions drawn and knowledge acquired.

### **Step 3 - Conduct the Interview**

Here is an effective model for behavioral interviews. Timings are based on a one hour interview, but your interviews may be shorter or longer.

- A. Establish rapport and get background information. Keep questions and discussions within the realm of acceptable, work-related topics. Establishing rapport **should not** include discussion of personal topics. (5-7 minutes)
- B. Obtain behavioral information on mandatory competencies (30-40 minutes). Ask the directing questions prepared in advance of the interview and follow up with probing questions as needed.
- C. Describe the position, answer the candidate's questions. (5-10 minutes)
- D. Sell the position and the organization. (5-10 minutes)
- E. Close the interview (3 minutes)

### **Step 4 - Evaluate Candidates**

Assess the candidate against the mandatory competencies. To do this, assess the strength of the evidence the candidate presented in your behavioral interview: how well does the candidate match up to what you're looking for? Document your evaluation and make a hire or no hire decision.

### **Conclusion**

The work of defining competencies and developing behavioral interviewing questions for a position needs to be done only every few years, not each time you need to fill the job. For most positions, unless they change radically, performing a quick annual update to the competencies and tweaking the behavioral interview questions is all that's needed. With a little time and effort, your organization can significantly improve the quality of the people hired by using the concepts of behavioral interviewing.