

Behavioral Interviews

Being on the candidate side of a behavioral interview can be exceedingly stressful. A behavioral interview is one in which the interviewer asks detailed questions about your past experiences. Instead of asking "How would you deal with an irate customer?" The interviewer will say, "Tell me about an incident in which you had to deal with an angry customer. What did you do? What was the outcome?" It's pretty easy to figure out what the interviewer wants to hear in answer to the first question and give them that hypothetical answer. If you're asked the second question, and unprepared, you can easily start to panic, trying to think of the least bad situation or the incident that had the best outcome. If you hesitate or tiptoe around the question, the interviewer will delve deeper to get at the truth.

So, before you get into this situation, it's best to prepare for it. You'll be surprised at how thinking about your experiences in these terms will improve your ability to present yourself and your qualifications in any situation.

Behavioral interviews are designed around the premise that the best indicator of your future performance is your past behavior. The basic traits that interviewers most often search for are: Assertiveness, Clarification, Commitment to Task, Dealing with Ambiguity, Decision Making, Interaction, Leadership, Management Skills, Communication Skills, Organizational Skills, Problem Solving and Team Building. Questions are developed around these traits to determine a candidate's capabilities in each of these areas (or other areas relevant to the position).

The interviewer, in asking these open-ended questions, wants to hear a detailed accounting of what happened – not just a general overview. By providing a thorough account, including a background of events leading up to the situation, your reaction and role in it, and the outcome and lessons learned from it, the interviewer will be able to predict how you will react in the future to a similar situation.

Candidates should prepare for a behavioral interview by thinking of instances that correlate with each of the above traits – a situation in which you showed leadership, how you functioned within a team, etc... Thinking of a negative example may be even more useful, as interviewers will often ask about the times when things didn't go as planned. If your interviewer takes this approach, make sure that you include the lessons you learned and how these will impact your future behavior in your answer. "If it happened again, I would make sure to..."

Many employers prefer that you deliver your responses to behavioral or competency based interviews using a format that asks you to outline the given problem or challenge, explain how you handled it, and describe the results of your actions. Try using the **S.T.A.R.** technique – **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esults when answering these questions.

S.T.A.R. will allow you to craft your responses with a targeted beginning, a brief explanatory middle, and a strong ending that provides the interviewer with details that demonstrate what you can do for them. Using this format allows you to neatly link your responses to employer's behavioral or competency questions and focuses the conversation on how you can do the job. **S.T.A.R.** examples should be concise and compelling as outlined below.

Situation: *Define the situation or "set the stage".*

Example: "assigned as an account manager to take over an underperforming sales territory – #92 out of 100 districts."

Task: *Identify the key objective / task performed.*

Example: "To increase sales 20% and boost customer base 10%."

Action: *Describe the action you took or initiated. This response should illustrate the specific skills you used in completing the task.*

Example: "Conducted a market analysis and customer service survey; developed a business plan that focused on value-added service, sales incentives, and referral bonus program to benefit customers; and rolled out a 3-level marketing strategy to implement the plan."

Result: *Summarize the outcome.*

Example: "District ranking improved to #9 in the region within a year; store sales increased 37%; net profit margin per sale improved 7%; and commercial customer base grew 18%. My business plan was adapted for use by all account managers in the region. Earned Account Manager of the Year Award"

We recommend that you prepare several **S.T.A.R.** examples to address various aspects of the position you are interviewing for. Your inventory of examples can represent everything from simple improvements to major achievements. They can represent individual successes or team contributions. In short, your **S.T.A.R.** stories will not only help you feel more confident and better prepared for the interview, but will improve your perceived value in the eyes of your potential employers.

S.T.A.R. Worksheet

S = Situation

T = Task

A = Actions you took

R = Results delivered

Situation:

Where:

When:

Who else was involved from your team or people who were impacted:

One problem I had to overcome was:

Task:

One specific issue I addressed was:

Action:

To solve the problem, I:

Results:

The end result was: