

Behavioural Interviewing

Behavioural Interviewing is a style of interviewing that many organizations are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind Behavioural interviewing is this: the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. Traditional interviewing questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of Behavioural interviewing is much more probing and works very differently. Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are looking and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. For example, if successful leadership is necessary for a position, you may be asked to talk about an experience in which you were a leader as well as what you think makes a good leader. To assess which skills the employer seeks, review employer literature, speak with alumni, family and friends who work for the employers, and listen carefully during the organization's information session.

During a Behavioural interview, always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely. Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations from your experiences on your resume where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks. During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them about the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. Your answer should contain these three steps (Context, Action, Result or "CAR") for optimum success.

CAR Method

Context / Circumstances: give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome

Action: what did you do about it? What were the steps you put in place to come up with a solution?

Results: what happened at the end of the situation? Was it successfully resolved? How did it make an impact?

Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated CAR stories) during the interview.

It is helpful to frame your answer as a story that you can tell. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. They refer to this as "digging a well." The interviewer will sometimes ask you open ended questions to allow you to choose which examples you wish to use. When a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, he/she will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person." or "Lead me through your decision process."

Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."

Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then? What did you learn? Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service and work experience.

Example of a CAR Answer

Context / Circumstances: During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events. I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

Action: I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

Result: We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year.

Examples of Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions can be difficult if you are not prepared. Always try to be conscious about what the recruiter is trying to find out about you by asking you a particular question. Here are some examples:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see 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 judgment 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 me 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 communications 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 that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- 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).

Further examples of answering using the CAR format

1. A candidate for a customer services role is asked:

"Describe a situation when you had to deliver excellent customer service following a complaint"

- **Circumstances/situation:** "A customer rang up complaining that they'd waited more than two weeks for a reply from our sales team regarding a product query. I needed to address the client's immediate query and find out what went wrong in the normal process."
- **Action:** "I apologised, got the details and passed them to our head salesperson, who contacted the client within the hour. I investigated why the query hadn't been answered. I discovered that it was a combination of a wrong mobile number and a generic email address that wasn't being checked. I let the client know and we offered a goodwill discount on her next order."
- **Result:** "The client not only continued to order from us but posted a positive customer service tweet."

An applicant for a marketing role is asked

"Tell me about a time that you solved a problem to a tight timescale."

- **Circumstances/situation:** "We were due to be delivering a presentation to a group of 30 interested industry players on our new product and Stuart, the guy due to deliver it, got stuck on a train from Papakura. It was my responsibility to find an alternative so it didn't reflect badly on the company and we didn't waste the opportunity."
- **Action:** "I spoke to the event organisers to find out if they could change the running order. They agreed so we bought ourselves some time. I contacted Susan, another member of the team, who at a push could step in. She agreed to drop what she was doing and head to the event."
- **Result:** "Stuart didn't make the meeting on time but we explained the problem to the delegates and Susan's presentation went well – a bit rough around the edges but it was warmly received. Stuart managed to get there for the last 15 minutes to answer questions. As a result, we gained some good contacts, at least two of which we converted into paying clients."