

Behavioral Interviews: Use Behavioral Interviewing to Select the Best

Behavioral interviews are the best tool you have to identify candidates who have the behavioral traits and characteristics that you have selected as necessary for success in a particular job.

Additionally, behavioral interviews ask the candidate to pinpoint specific instances in which a particular behavior was exhibited in the past. In the best behaviorally-based interviews, the candidate is unaware of the behavior the interviewer is verifying.

As you read my tips in *How to Conduct an Effective Behavioral Interview* below, please note that the actual behavioral interview is preceded by behavioral trait identification and a job description. The upfront work makes the behavioral interview effective and successful.

How to Conduct an Effective Behavioral Interview

- Start by identifying what you want the employee to do in the open job. Use job evaluation and write a job description to describe the requirements of the position.
- Determine the required outputs and performance success factors for the job.
- Determine the characteristics and traits of the individual whom you believe will succeed in that job. If you have employees successfully performing the job currently, list the traits, characteristics, and skills they bring to the job.
- Narrow the list to your key behavioral traits for the job.
- Write a job ad or job posting that employs the behavioral characteristics in the text. Make sure the characteristics or requirements section of your job description lists the same behavioral characteristics.
- Make a list of questions, both behavioral and traditional, to ask each candidate during the behavioral interview. A structured list makes candidate selection more defensible and allows you to make comparisons between the various answers and approaches of your interviewees.
- Review the resumes and cover letters you receive with the behavioral traits and characteristics in mind.
- Phone screen the candidates who have caught your attention with their qualifications, if necessary, to further narrow the candidate pool.
- Schedule interviews with the candidates who most appear to have the behavioral characteristics, along with the skills, experience, education, and the other factors you would normally screen for in your resume review.
- Ask your list of behavioral and traditional questions of each candidate you interview.
- Narrow your candidate choices based on their responses to the behavioral and traditional interview questions. Complete the selection process using these recommended steps.
- Select your candidate with behavioral characteristics that match the needs of the job in mind.

Looking for a sample behavioral interview preparation? Read on to see the techniques applied to a sales representative position.

In one company, a list of behavioral characteristics was prepared for the position: sales representative. Behavioral characteristics included:

- Adaptable
- Articulate
- Accountable
- Perseverance
- Listener
- High energy
- Confident
- High integrity
- Self-directed
- Focused
- Effective networker
- Money hungry
- Enthusiastic

The company **prepared a job description that reflected these behavioral characteristics**. Then, the company **posted the job** in a variety of online and offline locations.

Behavioral Job Posting for Sales Representative

Part of the posting stated:

"Successful track record in selling and customer account management for small, medium and large customer accounts; high, demonstrated energy levels, extremely motivated to succeed; accountable for results; computer skills in Microsoft Windows products including MS Word, Excel, and PowerPoint;

"excellent written and verbal communication skills; interacts with and works well with others in various fast changing, environments/situations including strong networking and listening skills; effective problem solving skills; able to motivate others through persuasion and leadership, able to prioritize, manage time and orchestrate multiple tasks simultaneously; able to maintain self-confidence and high self esteem in tasks such as cold calling and prospecting;

"able to effectively work independently or in a team environment; able to maintain company and customer confidentiality; practices corporate and personal integrity on the highest level ... Salary and commissions commensurate with contribution."

Resumes and cover letters were screened for the stated behavioral and traditional characteristics and traits listed. Interviews were set with the most likely candidates.

Behavioral Interview Questions

These are examples of behavioral interview questions that were asked of the candidates. Keep in mind that the employer is seeking evidence of the behavioral traits established at the beginning of the hiring process. The applicant may or may not have figured out the behavioral characteristics the employer is seeking. If the candidate read the job posting carefully and prepared for the interview, a savvy candidate will have a good idea about what behavioral traits the employer is seeking.

- Tell me about a time when you obtained a new customer through networking activities.
- Give me an example of a time when you obtained a customer through cold calling and prospecting. How did you approach the customer?

- What are your three most important work related values? Then, please provide an example of a situation in which you demonstrated each value at work.
- Think of a customer relationship you have maintained for multiple years. Please tell me how you have approached maintaining that relationship.
- Your manufacturing facility shipped the wrong order to one of your important customers. Describe how you solved this problem both internally and externally.
- The quantity of parts and the part numbers of items available for sale change daily. Talk to me about how you have handled similar situations in the past.
- If you are hired as our sales representative, you may see the need to change the organization of the department. How have you approached such situations in the past?
- Give me an example of a time when your integrity was tested and prevailed in a selling situation.

With answers to behavioral questions such as these, you have comparisons you can make between candidates and their approaches to selling. You have a good idea about how the candidate has approached selling situations similar to yours in the past. The values and behavioral characteristics and traits you have identified and sought out give you a much better idea whether the selected candidate is a good fit for your position. Use behavioral interviewing to select the sales representative most likely to succeed.

Take a look at the advice that About's Job Searching Guide, Alison Doyle, gives job searchers about behavioral interviews.