

Behavioral Interviewing

What is a behavioral interview?

Behavioral interviews are based on the assumption “behaviors you have demonstrated in the past will better predict your behaviors or performance in the future.” This technique utilizes questions designed to assess the presence of specific personality characteristics and skills sought by the employer. For example, if your answers demonstrate to an employer you have previously exceeded expectations, the employer can assume in the future you will continue to do so.

Employers consistently indicate UMSL candidates need to offer more specific answers and examples when interviewing. Studies have shown job seekers who are successful at behavioral interviewing tend to perform better in interviews, even when the interview questions are not behavioral in nature.

How can I prepare for a behavioral interview?

Analyze the skills sought by the employer: The employer determines the skills important to the job prior to interviewing candidates by conducting an analysis of the position and examining job functions. Skills sought by employers will vary by organization, and the specific position. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, here are the top skills and qualities employers generally seek in recent graduates:

- Communication skills (verbal & written)
- Honesty/integrity
- Teamwork skills (works well with others)
- Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
- Motivation/initiative
- Strong work ethic
- Analytical skills
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Organizational skills
- Detail oriented
- Leadership skills
- Self-confidence
- Friendly/outgoing personality
- Tactfulness
- Well-mannered/polite
- Sense of humor

Answering behavioral based questions using the STAR method:

STAR = Situation Task/Action Result

Make sure your answers to interview questions include these elements!

Question: *Give me an example of a problem you faced and how you handled it.*

Answer: “The quality control checks showed that we were producing too many defective units. Despite the fact that orders were backed up, I shut down the line and did some troubleshooting for problems. The very next day we were producing top quality units and the defects were below 5 percent again.”

Situation = Producing too many defective units, backed up orders.
Task/Action = Shutting down the line, troubleshooting.
Result = Returning to production of top quality/low defect units.

Preparing for a behavioral interview:

Review your resume and the description of the position for which you are interviewing. Using your resume as a guide, think of detailed examples where you have demonstrated the skills sought by the employer. Use the STAR method to structure your examples.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Here are some frequently asked behavioral interview questions, followed by the skill/quality assessed (in parenthesis).

- Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? (**Initiative**)
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so you can meet deadlines? (**Organizational**)
- Tell me about a time when you were part of a team that did not get along or did not work well together. What happened? (**Teamwork**)
- Tell me about a disagreement you found difficult to handle. Why was it difficult? What did you do? How did it work out? (**Interpersonal**)
- Give me an example of a time you had to make a decision where you needed to carefully consider a great deal of conflicting, as well as supporting, information, opinions, & data. (**Analytical**)
- Tell me about a time when you did your best to resolve a customer or client concern & the individual was still not satisfied. (**Communication**)
- Tell me about a time when you had to stop working on a project/idea/ assignment & start working on a completely different one. What did you do? How did that work out? (**Flexibility**)
- We all get assignments we really don't want to do. Give me an example of a time that happened to you & how you motivated yourself to get it done. (**Motivation**)
- Tell me about a time you found & took advantage of an opportunity to make an improvement in your position or department/team/group. (**Leadership**)

For additional information on interviewing, contact Career Services at 314-516-5111 to schedule an appointment, or join us for an Interviewing Skills workshop.

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