

Behavior-based Interviewing: Past Predicts Future

Although the term "par" is very familiar to golfers, it is perhaps not as familiar to candidates conducting a job search. For many individuals, the interview process is a daunting one, complete with a series of questions one hopes to answer to the interviewer's satisfaction. Many employers today are using a behavior-based interview approach based on the premise that past behavior (performance) predicts future behavior (performance). A complete answer is "PAR for the Course." Your answer to a behavior-based question must explain the task or Problem for which you were responsible, the specific Action you took, and the Results of your action. Your answer must contain all of these components to be a PAR answer.

Employers still use a more traditional approach in certain situations so you can still plan to be asked about your strengths, weaknesses, academic preparation, and interest in the organization. These questions may come up frequently in initial pre-screening interviews. While they are valid questions, they do not probe as deep as behavior-based questions. In short, behavior-based questions require you to provide specific examples from your past to illustrate how you have dealt with certain situations. Based upon the position, employer questions may touch upon such areas as teamwork, conflict resolution, cultural diversity, customer service, time management, and leadership. For the candidate, past performance examples may come from work experience, internships, academic work, volunteer service, activities, hobbies, family life, and other areas of one's background.

So what are some examples of behavior-based questions? You may be asked some variations of the following questions:

- Give me an example of a time when you served in a leadership role and some member of the team was not handling their responsibilities. How did you address this situation?
- Describe a time when you had multiple tasks to accomplish and deadlines were approaching. How did you prioritize what needed to be accomplished first?
- We all deal with difficult situations. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict. How did you handle it?

These questions illustrate the fact that you cannot come into the interview without sufficient preparation. Whereas a traditional interview might include a question asking you to share several strengths you possess, the BBI equivalent of this question requires you to provide specific examples of how you demonstrated these strengths.

This approach has become the norm rather than the exception today. While many companies still use a combination of more traditional questions and BBI questions, the trend is definitely toward the BBI approach. Employers have embraced

this approach in an attempt to select the most qualified candidates to meet their staffing needs. This approach is more objective than the traditional interview because candidates are not providing hypothetical responses to situations, but rather real life examples of how they have handled these situations.

So how does one prepare for a behavior-based interview? The following steps outline an effective way in which to prepare:

- Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. What skills are required by employees?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have that relate to your job objective?
- Identify examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. Concentrate on developing complete PAR answers.
- Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers or specifics help to make your case.
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then?
- Before starting the interview process, identify several of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated PAR stories) during the interview.

While behavior-based interviewing may appear to be very challenging, preparation has always been key to a successful interview. Preparation has meant knowing about the organization and their needs, evaluating your background, and linking the two. If you do the quality preparation required for an interview, you will likely have a successful experience. While one may struggle on the golf course, there is no reason the same should be true in an interview setting. Just remember PAR (Problem, Action, Result)!

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Working with people from different backgrounds or cultures can be a real challenge. Have you had this experience?
- What are some of the most stressful aspects of your job? Why? How did you react to them?
- Describe a time when you faced a particularly demanding rush situation (emergency, deadline, etc.). How did you respond?
- Have you ever faced an ethical or value conflict in your job? Explain.
- Describe a situation in which you have seen another employee do something that you thought was inappropriate. What did you do?
- In what skill areas are you most proficient? Give an example of a project you have worked on that shows your expertise. What skill area do you see as needing further development?
- Give an example of a time when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle him/her?
- What are some of your strengths in dealing with people? Tell me about a time when you used one of these strengths to resolve a conflict.
- Give me a recent example that best shows your ability to communicate effectively.
- Give me an example of a complex process/situation you had to describe to someone. What specifically did you do to make sure the information was clear?
- Listening is a valuable tool. Describe a time when good listening skills helped you overcome a communication problem.
- What has been the most challenging written assignment you have had? What made it challenging?
- How do you determine if the work you do is a quality job? What are some ways that you have improved the quality of your own work?
- Give an example of a team decision in which you were involved in recently. What did you do to help the team reach the decision?
- Have you ever been in a group situation in which one of the members was unproductive or uncooperative? How did you handle it?
- Describe a time when you made a decision that was unpopular with the other members of your group. What was the end result?
- Describe a situation in which you identified a problem and explain how you resolved it (root cause investigation, recommending a countermeasure, follow-up, etc.)
- We all know that some problems just don't have solutions. Tell me about a problem you tried to solve but couldn't.
- Describe a situation that required you to handle multiple tasks at one time. What did you do?
- What is your procedure for keeping track of items that require your attention?
- We have all had times when we just couldn't complete everything on time. Describe when this has happened to you. What did you do?
- What has been one of the most difficult decisions you have had to make on the job? What facts did you consider? How long did it take you to decide?
- When (if ever) have you delayed making a decision to give more thought to the situation?
- Describe a time when you had to obtain information by asking several questions of other people. How did you know what to ask?
- Give an example of a time when you did more than what was required in your job.
- How do you define leadership? Describe the most recent time when you displayed leadership on the job.
- Describe a situation in which you had to influence another peer to cooperate. What exactly did you do to accomplish this?