Behavioral Interviews:
It's Not What You Know, It's What You Did

What is a Behavioral Interview?

In a behavioral interview you will have to demonstrate your knowledge, skills, and abilities, collectively known as competencies, by giving specific examples from your past experiences. The interviewer wants to know, not that you can do something, but that you have done it. He or she, prior to the interview, determines what competencies are required for the position. Then the interviewer develops a series of questions that will allow him or her to find out if you, the job candidate, possesses the necessary competencies to perform the job. The basic premise of the behavioral interview is that past performance is a good predictor of future performance.

While many candidates are intimidated by this method, a behavioral interview gives you the opportunity to demonstrate to a prospective employer why you are well suited for the job. Rather then merely telling the interviewer what you would do in a situation, as in a regular interview, in a behavioral interview you must describe, in detail, how you handled a situation in the past. What better way to "strut your stuff?"

On a behavioral interview, you can expect questions like "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of when..." Fill in the blanks with one of any number of skills, knowledge, or abilities the interviewer is trying to ascertain you have. For example, if conflict resolution is a required competency, the question may be "Tell me about a time two people you had to work with weren't getting along." If you have work experience you can talk about two of your co-workers. If you're interviewing for your first job you can select an experience that occurred during a time you worked on a group project, or participated in a team sport. As long as you clearly state the problem, demonstrate the steps you took to resolve it, and discuss the results, it doesn't matter what experience you draw upon.

Why Would an Employer Use This Technique

When asked simple yes or no questions, a job candidate can easily tell an interviewer what he or she wants to hear. For example, if you're asked what you would do if a client suddenly moved up the deadline on a project, you could reply that you would put in overtime as necessary. However, if the interviewer asks what you have done in the past to complete a project on a tight deadline, you would have to give a real-life example, detailing how you handled the situation. Then the interviewer could ask some probing questions to verify that what you are saying actually happened. For example, she might ask how many hours you spent on the project and whether the client was happy with the results, or what grade you got if you're talking about a school project.
Preparing for the Behavioral Interview

The difficult part of the behavioral interview is preparing for it. First you must determine what competencies the employer is looking for. Read through the job description. If you're working with a recruiter talk to him or her. Research the company to learn more about it. Here are some of the competencies the employer may be seeking:

- Enthusiasm
- Knowledge/Skills
- Decision Making
- Leadership
- Personal Attributes
- Team Building
- Flexibility
- Communication
- Personal Attributes
- Team Building

Next you need to come up with examples of how you've demonstrated those competencies. You can start by listing questions an interviewer might ask you. Here are some articles to help you get started. They all contain sample questions and some of them even categorize the questions according to the competency they demonstrate:

*Behavioral Based Interview Questions*, from University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
*Behavioral Interview Questions*, from Wood-West and Partners, Inc.
*Behavioral Interview Sample*, from Jean Kelley Companies.
*Sample Behavior Questions*, from Mount Vernon Nazarene College.

Next, looking back at your past jobs, try to answer the questions related to the competencies the job requires. Your time in school is also a good place to look. About Guide to Sociology, Kathy S. Stolley, Ph.D., in an article titled “Put Your Group Project Experience to Work for You”, says “Like many new graduates, you may not have much experience in the paid work-force when you begin your job search. However, your group projects provide excellent opportunities to demonstrate skills that employers are seeking.”

Write down your stories. Be as specific as you can. In talking about the event, talk about who was involved, what problem occurred, and what you did to help resolve it. Also discuss the outcome. Think not only of examples with positive outcomes, but those with negative outcomes as well. Interviewers will ask you about situations that you could not resolve favorably and what you learned from those experiences.

Next...You may not be facing a behavioral interview right now, but you may have one in the future. How can you start preparing now? You'll also find some resources to help you learn more about this method.
Behavioral Interview Questions

The behavioral based interview is founded on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. Rather than asking you directly if you have a particular skill or trait (to which you would probably answer "yes!"), the interviewer asks you to provide an example of a time when you demonstrated the skill or trait that they are seeking. These questions will often begin with phrases such as: "Tell me about a time when..." or "Describe a situation in which...".

An effective response to a behavioral based interview question will possess certain characteristics. It will be specific in describing the example situation or problem, clearly spell out the action taken by the candidate to resolve the situation, and state the result of that action or intervention.

The following are examples of behavioral based interview questions listed under the area that the interviewer is trying to probe:

**Professional or technical knowledge**
- Q. Describe a situation where your professional/technical expertise made a significant difference.

**Decision making**
- Q. Tell me about a time when you took a public stance on an issue and then had to change your position?
- Q. Describe a situation where you handled decisions under pressure or when time limits were imposed?

**Enthusiasm**
- Q. Relate a scenario where you were responsible for motivating others.
- Q. Describe a really tough or long day and how you dealt with the situation?

**Personal attributes or qualities**
- Q. Tell me about a time when you set and accomplished short term, medium range and long term goals? What were the differences in your approach to each?

**Unpleasant situations**
- Q. Relate a personal story in which you persuaded someone to do something that initially did not appeal to them.

**Team Work**
- Q. Tell me about a time when, if it hadn’t been for teamwork, your goal might not have been achieved.

**Leadership**
- Q. Describe a scenario in which you have gone above and beyond what was expected of you.
- Q. Describe a time in which you took initiative rather than waiting to be told what to do.

**Flexibility**
- Q. Narrate a situation during college in which you experienced a particularly high level of stress.
- Q. Describe a project or goal that has caused you frustration.

**Communication**
- Q. Tell me about a time when you did your best to resolve a customer or client concern and the individual still was not satisfied. What did you do next?
- Q. Describe an opportunity in which you’ve had to make a presentation to a large group. Describe an opportunity in which you’ve had to make a presentation to a small group. What did you do differently to prepare for each?
5 Interview Mistakes (and how to avoid them)

You're bright. You're qualified for the position. How can you maximize your chances of succeeding in your interviews? Many errors begin with misconceptions about the process. The following beliefs are among the most common and costly.

1. *The interview begins when I shake hands with the interviewer.*

   NO. In the employer's office, it begins when you walk through the front door. Employees other than your interviewer may observe you from the time you take your first step. Don't slight anyone. While employment decisions are generally not made by receptionists, your potential boss may ask the receptionist for his or her impression of you. Be polite and friendly to everyone around you. Walk and speak with an air of confidence. Keep your posture formal when you are standing or sitting. Follow the same rules when interviewing with recruiters in the lobby of Career Services. Occasionally, a company will send staff members to interview students in the rooms, along with one or two staff members who sit in the lobby and greet students before their interviews with the company. These "greeters" may make small talk, but don't become too casual during this chat. You are already being assessed.

2. *All I need to do is answer the questions correctly.*

   Dead wrong. Your mission is to sell yourself. The burden of proof is yours. The interviewer may not ask you directly the questions you want to answer, but don't leave the room until you have clearly expressed the reasons why you are an excellent candidate for the job. This means, of course, that well before the interview, you must first be able to answer this question of yourself.

3. *Asking about promotions shows that I'm ambitious.*

   Wrong. It shows that you are putting the cart before the horse. You have precious few minutes in an interview, and the time you spend on this issue takes up time that you could be using to illustrate your selling points. You don't yet have the job. Furthermore, asking this question now may seem an indication of greed or of being focused solely upon your own desires. If you sell yourself well enough to receive a second interview, then you would have gained nothing by asking about this earlier.

4. *The interview is over when the interviewer says so.*

   When the interview is winding down, the interviewer should invite you to ask questions -- an invitation you should accept. After your questions about the position and the company are answered, summarize your qualifications. The interviewer may then thank you for coming. However, it's still not over if you don't know what the next step is. Ask whether the company will contact you, and when. Then thank the interviewer and go home to write a thank-you letter to him or her, sent to the address on the business card for which you wisely asked during the interview. (It is a good use of time, as you wait for your on-campus interview, to jot down the name and address from the business card which is posted in our Recruiting Lobby.)

5. *If I mess up, I should play it cool and hope the interviewer doesn't notice.*

   Don't ignore what is probably obvious to the interviewer, who is there to observe you from every angle. The way you handle adversity can be more telling to an employer than the rest of your presentation, no matter how polished it is. Don't be flustered if you drop your briefcase, or hand your resume across the desk upside down. These are just minor mishaps. To recover from an interview fumble, make a short, sweet apology. Don't dwell on it, and don't let it haunt the rest of the interview. We ALL make mistakes, from time to time, even your interviewer!
Questions Asked by Employers

Personal
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your hobbies?
- Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- Can you name some weaknesses?
- Define success. Failure.
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
- Of which accomplishments are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How does your college education or work experience relate to this position?
- What motivates you most to succeed?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting along with a professor/supervisor/co-worker? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever spoken in front of a large group? How large?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What do you know about our organization (mission, goals, competitors, products, services)?
- Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
- Do you plan to return to school for further education?

Education
- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
- Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?
- In which campus activities did you participate?
- Which classes in your major did you like best? Least? Why?
- Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
- If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
- Do you think your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or Why not?
- Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?

Experience
- What job-related skills have you developed?
- Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
- What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
- Have you ever done any volunteer work? What kind?
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
Career Goals

- Do you prefer to work under close supervision or on your own?
- What kind of supervisor do you work best with?
- Would you be successful working with a team?
- Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
- What other types of positions are you considering?
- How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
- How do you feel about travel?
- How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?
- Are you willing to work flextime?
Making a Good First Impression

Although we don’t always like to admit it, first impressions are important. Every day we come in contact with new people and ever day we use items such as facial expressions, clothing, grooming, vocal tone and pitch, posture and gestures to initially read a person. Your body talks. You can tell it what to say with some attention to this form of communication. Non-verbal signs signal both positive and negative messages. Make yours positive!

Interview Attire

There are many aspects of an interview that you can’t control - the questions, the location, etc. However, you are in total control of your appearance. What image do you wish to project? Research shows that interviewers make 90% of the selection decisions within the first ten minutes of the interview. According to “Dress For Success” expert, John T. Malloy, the most common reason for eliminating a person before the interview started was that he/she was dressed inappropriately. In most cases, those eliminated were dressed too casually. Companies often expect people to dress better for interviews than for work. If you do not dress up for an interview, you send the signal to many employers that you are not interested in the position. Interviewers are also turned off by poor grooming, sloppy shoes, too much makeup, too much perfume/ aftershave, etc.

Job applicants are almost never turned down because their appearance is too traditional and classic.

Looking the Part

- You and your clothing must be squeaky clean.
- In general, a classically cut suit in a charcoal gray or navy is appropriate for both men and women (skirted). (NOTE: There are geographical as well as occupational differences regarding appropriate attire. Know what they are for the position you are considering.)
- A long sleeved white shirt for men and a simple white or off-white blouse for women is recommended. NOTE: as above)
- Jewelry should be simple and kept to a modest minimum. No more that one ring on each hand.
- A strand of pearls or simple pin or chain always look elegant.
- Purchase a quality tie. The tip of the tie should barely touch the top of your belt buckle. When choosing patterns, remember: the smaller the pattern, the more authority you’ll project.
- Shoes and other leather accessories should match.
- Do a “clothing quality check”! Are seams neat? How will the fabric wear? How’s the fit? Do you look as good sitting as standing? Do the patterns match? Quality garments stand the test of time.

Check Your Body Language

Confidence can be very attractive. Picture in your mind’s eye just what a confident person looks like.

- Posture - straight or slouched?
- Gait - turtle’s pace or quick?
- Style - assertive or timid?
- Voice - clear or mumbled?
- Rate of Speech - hurried or easy to follow?
- Gestures - expressive or nervous fidgets?
- Facial expression - smiling or stiff and scared?
- Hand shake - fish limp or comfortable firm?

Now, take a look at yourself in the mirror. Are you standing and sitting straight? Do have a pleasant facial expression? Do you look happy to be here?
Sample behavior-based interview questions:

- 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 problem.

- 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 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 communication 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 which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation which you have had to complete.

- 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).
Sample Behavioral Questions

Tell me about the time when you...

- achieved a great deal in a short amount of time.
- were disappointed in your performance.
- made a major sacrifice to achieve an important goal.
- were unwilling or unable to make the necessary sacrifice to achieve a goal.
- worked effectively under a great deal of pressure.
- did not handle a stressful situation.
- were really bothered by the actions of another coworker.
- were especially creative in solving a problem.
- organized or planned an event that was very successful.
- were unable to complete a project on schedule despite your best efforts.
- really had to remain flexible.
- had to deal with a personality conflict with a boss or coworker.
- felt really good about the decision you made and the process you went through.
- were very effective in your problem-solving ability.
- used facts and reason to persuade someone to accept your recommendation.
- utilized your leadership ability to gain support for what initially had strong opposition.
- were able to build team spirit in a time of low morale.
- were able to gain commitment from others to really work as a team.
- were particularly perceptive regarding a person's or group's feelings and needs.
- built rapport quickly with someone under difficult conditions.
- wrote a report that was well received by others.
- were particularly effective on prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule.
• identified potential problems and resolved the situation before it became serious.
• were highly motivated and your example inspired others.
• found it necessary to tactfully but forcefully say things that others did not want to hear.
• were particularly effective in a talk you gave or a seminar you taught.
• had to make an important decision quickly even though you did not have all the information you wanted.
• had to make a decision you knew would be unpopular.
• made a mistake and learned from it.
• made an intentional effort to get to know someone from another culture.
• were able to sell your idea to a key person.
• were unable to sell your idea to a key person.
Are You Ready for a Behavioral Interview?

"Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and one of the members wasn't carrying his or her weight." If this is one of the leading questions in your job interview, you could be in for a behavioral interview. Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior, this style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance among recruiters. Today, more than ever, every hiring decision is critical. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

James F. Reder, manager of staff planning and college relations for Occidental Chemical Corporation in Dallas, says, "Although we have not conducted any formal studies to determine whether retention or success on the job here has been affected, I feel our move to behavioral interviewing has been successful. It helps concentrate recruiters' questions on areas important to our candidates' success within Occidental." The company introduced behavioral interviewing in 1986 at several sites and has since implemented it company wide.
Behavioral vs. Traditional Interviews

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways:

- Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.
- The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.
- You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories.
- Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview.

The behavioral interviewer has been trained to objectively collect and evaluate information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency.

If you are an entry-level candidate with no previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position:

- "Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it."
- "Give an example of when you had to work with your hands to accomplish a task or project."
- "What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

- "Can you give me an example?"
- "What did you do?"
- "What did you say?"
- "What were you thinking?"
- "How did you feel?"
- "What was your role?"
- "What was the result?"

You will notice an absence of such questions as, "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."
How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

A possible response for the question, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member wasn't pulling his or her weight" might go as follows:

"I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it upon yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.
Don't Forget the Basics

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for past actions only. It will always be important to put your best foot forward and make a good impression on the interviewer with appropriate attire, good grooming, a firm handshake and direct eye contact. There is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.
What is Behavior Based Interviewing?

Behavior based interviewing focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. It is based on the belief that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance. You may use work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, school projects, family life - anything really - as examples of your past behavior. Current employment literature indicates that there is a strong trend towards this type of interviewing. In addition to questions found in many current resources, you should also consider the following in your interview preparations.

What Do Employers Evaluate in A Behavioral Interview?

Employers are looking for 3 types of skills: Content Skills, Functional - also called Transferable Skills, and Adaptive - also called Self Management Skills.

**Content Skills** -- Knowledge that is work specific such as computer programming, accounting, welding, etc. expressed as nouns.

**Functional or Transferable Skills** -- Used with people, information or things such as organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc. expressed as verbs.

**Adaptive or Self-Management Skills** -- personal characteristics such as dependable, team player, self directed, punctual, etc. expressed as adjectives.

How Are Behavioral Questions Different from Other Types of Interviewing Questions?

There are 3 types of questions typically found in interviews:

1. **Theoretical questions** -- Questions that place you in a hypothetical situation. These questions are more likely to test your skill at answering questions rather than in doing a good job.
   
   *Example*: How would you organize your friends to help you move into a new apartment?

2. **Leading questions** -- Questions that hint at the answer the interviewer is seeking by the way they are phrased.
   
   *Example*: Working on your own doesn't bother you does it?

3. **Behavioral questions** -- Questions that seek demonstrated examples of behavior from your past experience and concentrate on job related functions. They may include:
   
   - **Open-ended questions** -- these require more than a yes or no response. They often begin with "Tell me...", "Describe...", "When...".
     *Example*: Describe a time you had to be flexible in planning a work load.
   
   - **Close-ended questions** -- Used mostly to verify or confirm information.
     *Example*: You have a degree in psychology, is that correct?
   
   - **Why questions** -- Used to reveal rationale for decisions you have made or to determine your level of motivation.
     *Example*: Why did you decide to major in this program at UWEC rather than at a small private college or larger university?
How Can I Best Answer Behavior-Based Questions?

Think of "PAR for the Course". A complete 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 actions. Your answer must contain all of these components to be a PAR answer. Tell the interviewer a "story" (with a beginning, a middle, and an end) about how you used a practical skill.

**Problem (P)** -- Advertising revenue was falling off for the Daily News and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

**Action (A)** -- I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of DN circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a College of Business professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

**Result (R)** -- We signed contracts with fifteen former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by twenty percent (quantities are always good) over the same period last year.

Can You Give Me An Example of A Complete PAR Story?

Right before Thanksgiving break, most of the guys had gone home for the weekend break. Our fraternity president and vice president had already left for home when we got a call that one of our brothers had been involved in a car accident. I volunteered to go to the hospital to be with him and then called his parents. I also made arrangements for them to stay at the Hospital Hospitality House when they got there. They were pleased I had taken time from my own weekend to help them. Our chapter advisor congratulated me for keeping a cool head and handling the situation. I've since decided to run for chapter office.

A Quiz on Questions

Determine which type of question each of the following is.

A. How would you resolve a customer service problem where the customer demanded an immediate refund?
B. Tell me about a time you had to juggle a number of work priorities. What did you do?
C. You can work weekends occasionally can't you?
D. What is your idea of the perfect job?
How Can I Prepare for A Behavioral Interview?

- Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. Try to get an actual job description. What skills are required by employers?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have (content, functional, and adaptive) that relate to your job objective?
- Identify examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. How can you "tell a story" about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing complete PAR answers and remember that a good story has a beginning, middle and end.
- Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- 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 2 to 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated PAR stories) during the interview.
- Once employed, keep a personal achievement diary to help document demonstrated performance (PAR stories).
Behavioral Interviews--A Job Candidate's Toughest Obstacle
By Damir Joseph Stimac

The interview begins like any other, exchanged pleasantries and then the interviewer starts asking really strange, specific questions. "Give me a specific example of a time when you didn't meet a deadline." Your mind races for an example which answers the question and then turns that failure into a success as suggested by your highly regarded interviewing book. The problem is that your outdated book taught you how to interview for traditional interviews-not behavioral (competency-based) interviews.

So where did behavioral interviews come from? In the late 1970's Industrial psychologists studied the effectiveness of traditional interviews and concluded that they aren't very effective in predicting a candidate's ability to do a job. The questions are often hypothetical or theoretical. Job candidates often end up giving hypothetical answers that sound great but aren't a true representation of what they would do in real situations.

An example of a traditional question may be: "How would you deal with an angry customer?" It isn't difficult to figure out what the interviewer probably wants to hear so you end up saying something like, "I would politely ask them to tell me the problem, then I would offer my assistance in solving the problem." That doesn't sound too bad. The problem is that your answer is theoretical. It doesn't represent what you would "actually do" in that situation.

An interviewer using behavioral techniques would ask the same question this way. "Give me a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer. What was the problem and what was the outcome?"

Your mind races and you come up with an answer. Imagine a lengthy interview with questions that ask for specific examples of past experiences. Interviewers asking behavioral interview questions also target negative outcomes, when a situation or a task didn't turn out the way you expected. "Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at your previous job that cost the company time and money."

Your mind races again and you search for an event that wasn't too terribly bad. The interviewer follows up with, "Is that the worst mistake you ever made?" The questions are very difficult and if you try to dance around the question, the interviewer has been taught to press even harder to get to the truth.

"The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that your past performance is the best predictor of future performance. In essence, if you ask behavioral questions, you're no longer asking questions that are hypothetical, but are asking questions that must be answered based upon fact," says Hewlett-Packard's Bill Smith.

The interviewer determines the knowledge, skills, and behaviors (often referred to as competencies) that are essential for success in a position. Competencies may include: Assertiveness, Clarification, Commitment to Task, Dealing with Ambiguity, Decision Making, Interaction, Leadership, Management Skills, Communication Effectiveness, Organizational Orientation, Problem Solving, Team Building and others. Each competency contains various questions that are designed to determine to what extent the candidate has performed successfully in previous situations similar to those they will encounter in the position for which they are interviewing.

"With a behavioral question, you're looking for results. You're not just looking for an activity list. So you're listening for things like names, dates, places, the outcome and especially what the individual's role was in achieving that outcome," says Smith.

Candidates can prepare for behavioral interviews by identifying specific examples for each of the above competencies. "The competency associated with interpersonal effectiveness is very important, particularly in the office environment. The relationships people have and how they get along with each other --that's an important part of being successful," says Pamela Cook, a staffing representative at US West.
When preparing, identify an unsuccessful example for each competency because you will probably be asked to give an example of a time when things didn't work out as planned. One way to end an answer to a negative probe is to say something like "the mistake caused me to delay the project, but it helped me to develop a project tracking system which would minimize the chance of that happening again."

Remember, mistakes are what help us learn. Whatever you do, don't tell the interviewer that you really can't think of any mistakes that you made. Don't make up an answer either because interviewers trained in behavioral interviewing techniques will probe deeply into your answer. You will have a hard time keeping your story straight if you start making things up. Inconsistent answers will cause you to be assessed negatively.

More and more companies are adopting behavioral interviews because they are very effective in identifying which candidate has the best possibility of success for the position. Understanding behavioral interviews is the key to preparing for one. Preparing for behavioral interviews can significantly help you in traditional interviews because you can give traditional interviewers specific answers to theoretical questions.

Example:
Interviewer:
"How would you address an angry customer?"
Applicant:
"I can give you a specific example. I was the manager of the department when a really irate customer came in yelling at everyone. He was upset because.... I invited him to my office and... He apologized for his outburst and bought the top of the line air compressor." When you give specific examples to interview questions, you establish credibility and believability, and that can ultimately translate into a job offer.

Best wishes, Joe Stimac

Please follow this link for additional examples of Probing Applicant Answers traditionally and behaviorally.

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Permission to reprint this article is granted by author. Please cite the following: Article by Damir Joseph Stimac, author of The Ultimate Job Search Kit and Career Talk host. For additional interviewing tips, visit Career Talk on the Internet. http://www.careertalk.com
Looking for a simple, yet effective way to immediately improve your interviewing and staff selection process? Define the qualities, talents and skills you’d most like to have in a new employee. Then, devise a series of questions that allow your applicant to demonstrate she has the desired qualities, talents and skills.

Many organizations are spending a great deal of time defining competencies for each position these days. You can if you have the time and resources to do so. You don’t have to embark on a lengthy process, however. Use a simple job description with a set of behaviorally-based interview questions to pinpoint the people you want in your organization. When your interview questions ask the applicant to tell you about behaviors and actions she has actually demonstrated in the past, your selection process will improve.

**Identify Characteristics of Your Best Employees**

At ReCellular, Inc., a cellular phone remanufacturing company in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a team of people put together a list of interview questions that immediately improved their hiring process. The team first defined the qualities, characteristics and basic aptitude they wanted to find in a potential remanufacturing employee. They wanted to find people who shared these characteristics.

- Excellent Attendance and Dependability
- Flexibility
- Integrity and Honesty
- Motivated and Dedicated
- Detail-Orientated
- Team-Orientated
- Strong Work Ethic
- Positive, Polite, and Approachable
- Continuous Improvement Orientated
- Good Communication Skills
- Actual Hands-On Demonstration of Capability to Sort Phones and Identify Cosmetic Problems With Phones

**Develop Interview Questions to Identify These Characteristics**

The team then worked with several online resources to structure questions that would indicate whether candidates had these characteristics. No list of questions is totally comprehensive, however, these questions are helping the interviewers find better candidates.
• What made you decide to apply at ReCellular?
• Tell me about yourself and your last/current job/class.
• When we call your previous employer or references what are they likely to tell us in regards to your dependability/attendance?
• Tell me about a time when you demonstrated your trustworthiness or integrity in school or at work.
• Tell me about a time when you were working hard to complete a task and you were asked to leave that task before completing it and start a different job.
• Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
• Give me an example of a time when you had set a goal for yourself and tell me how you went about accomplishing it.
• Give me a specific occasion on which you followed a policy with which you did not agree.
• 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).
• Tell me about a time when you improved a task or job you were working on.
• In what kind of a work environment do you do your best work?
• The potential employee then demonstrates the ability to sort phones and identify cosmetic problems on an actual box of phones.

This process is helping the organization select better employees. You can simply and with a few hours of work, develop a similar list of questions for job applicants. Determining a list of interview questions in advance allows comparisons of applicants across interviews. It also assists your organization to take a more team-oriented approach to interviewing and selecting candidates. When you have a pre-determined list of questions, you need to provide less training to teams of employees selecting new team members. You control the flow of the conversation and avoid asking illegal questions. Your hiring decisions will improve and you’ll have a better handle on the characteristics and abilities your applicants will bring to the work place.
Behavioral Interviewing Strategies

by Katharine Hansen

Behavioral interviewing is a relatively new mode of job interviewing. Employers such as AT&T and Accenture (the former Andersen Consulting) have been using behavioral interviewing for about 15 years now, and because increasing numbers of employers are using behavior-based methods to screen job candidates, understanding how to excel in this interview environment is becoming a crucial job-hunting skill.

The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10 percent predictive.

Behavioral-based interviewing is touted as providing a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interview questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear, even if you are fudging a bit on the truth. Even if you are asked situational questions that start out "How would you handle XYZ situation?" you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know, after all, if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would? In a behavioral interview, however, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a behavioral story, the behavioral interviewer typically will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer will probe further for more depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." If you've told a story that's anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success. The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position. For example, some of the characteristics that Accenture looks for include:

- Critical thinking
- Being a self-starter
- Willingness to learn
- Willingness to travel
- Self-confidence
- Teamwork
- Professionalism

The employer then structures very pointed questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if the candidate possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: "Tell about a time. . . " or "Describe a situation. . ." Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

As a candidate, you should be equipped to answer the questions thoroughly. Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills that the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. Researching the company and talking to people who work there will enable you to zero in on the kinds of
behaviors the company wants. (Click here to see a list of typical behaviors that employers might be trying to get at in a behavior-based interview.)

In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Candidates who tell the interviewer about particular situations that relate to each question will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms.

Ideally, you should briefly describe the situation, what specific action you took to have an effect on the situation, and the positive result or outcome. Frame it in a three-step process, usually called a S-A-R, P-A-R, or S-T-A-R statement:

1. situation (or task, problem),
2. action,
3. result/outcome.

Click here for a sample S-A-R statement. It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Become a great storyteller in your interviews, but be careful not to ramble. See also, STAR Interviewing Technique for more information.

It's difficult to prepare for a behavior-based interview because of the huge number and variety of possible behavioral questions you might be asked. The best way to prepare is to arm yourself with a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Despite the many possible behavioral questions, you can get some idea of what to expect by looking at Web sites that feature behavioral questions, including:

- Sample Behavioral Interview Questions
- Behavioral Interviewing
- How to Behave in a Behavior-Based Interview

Knowing what kinds of questions might be asked will help you prepare an effective selection of examples.

Use examples from internships, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience -- anything really -- as examples of your past behavior. In addition, you may use examples of special accomplishments, whether personal or professional, such as scoring the winning touchdown, being elected president of your Greek organization, winning a prize for your artwork, surfing a big wave, or raising money for charity. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers always impress employers.

Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or - better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

Here's a good way to prepare for behavior-based interviews:

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use fairly recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Accenture, in fact, specifies that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form and/or PAR/SAR/STAR.

To cram for a behavioral interview right before you're interviewed, review your resume. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory.
In the interview, listen carefully to each question, and pull an example out of your bag of tricks that provides an appropriate description of how you demonstrated the desired behavior. With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of different behavioral questions. Once you've snagged the job, keep a record of achievements and accomplishments so you'll be ready with more great examples the next time you go on a behavior interview.
Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

You may want to read about the **STAR Technique** as a method of answering behavioral-based questions.

Here is a list of sample behavioral-based interview questions that may help you practice:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
Behavioral Interviewing

The behavioral interview technique is used by employers to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors in order to determine their potential for success. The interviewer identifies desired skills and behaviors, then structures open-ended questions and statements to elicit detailed responses. A rating system is developed and selected criteria are evaluated during the interview. As a candidate, you should be prepared to answer the questions and statements thoroughly.

**FOCUS AND DEDICATION TO THE INDUSTRY:**

4. Why did you choose your major and career?
5. At what point did you make this decision?
6. Specifically, what attracts you to this industry as a career?

**TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE:**

Your level of understanding of technical and professional information and your ability to apply technical and professional skills.

1. Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head". Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous coursework to a project in another class.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**TEAMWORK:**

Working effectively with others in the organization and outside the formal lines of authority (i.e., peers, other units, senior management, and the like) to accomplish organizational goals and to identify and resolve problems. Considering the impact of your decisions on others.

1. Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your professor's or supervisor's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing their share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague? Did you agree or disagree with the manager's actions?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**ANALYSIS:**

Relating and comparing data from different sources, identifying issues, securing relevant information, and identifying relationships.

1. What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example(s) of how you have done this.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
3. Describe a situation in which you had to collect information by asking many questions of several people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? How did you prepare yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently if given the chance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**ADAPTABILITY:**

Maintaining effectiveness in varying environments, tasks and responsibilities, or with various types of people.

1. How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Tell of some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**WORK STANDARDS:**

Setting high goals or standards of performance for self, subordinates, others and the organization. Experiencing dissatisfaction with average performance.

1. Compare and contrast the times when you did work which was above the standard with times your work was below the standard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Above Standard</th>
<th>Below Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Describe some times when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet these standards?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. How have you differed from your professors in evaluating your performance? How did you handle the situation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**JOB MOTIVATION:**

The extent to which activities and responsibilities available in the job overlap with activities and responsibilities that result in personal satisfaction.

1. Give examples of your experiences at school or in a job that were satisfying. Give examples of your experiences that were dissatisfying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Why Satisfying</th>
<th>Why Dissatisfying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Type | Why this Preference?
INITIATIVE:
Making active attempts to influence events to achieve goals. Self-starting rather than passively accepting. Taking action to achieve goals beyond what is necessarily called for, originating action.
1. Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
   | Idea | Role in Implementation | Outcome |
2. Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
   | Situation | Action | Result |
3. Have you found any ways to make school or a job easier or more rewarding?
   | Situation | Action | Result |

ABILITY TO LEARN:
Assimilating and applying new job-related information promptly.
1. What tricks or techniques have you learned to make school or a job easier, or to make yourself more effective? How did you learn that?
   | Situation | Action | Result |

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING:
Establishing a course of action for yourself (and/or others) to accomplish specific goals. Planning proper assignments for personnel and appropriately allocating resources.
   | Priority | How Determined | Result |
2. Describe a time in school when you had many projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?
   | Situation | Action | Result |

COMMUNICATION:
Clearly expressing ideas in writing-including grammar, organization, and structure.
1. Tell of a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you-maybe a time when other people missed the key idea being expressed.
   | Situation | Action | Result |
2. What has been your experience in giving presentations to small or large groups? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?
   | Experience | Steps to Presentation | Result |

CUSTOMER SERVICE ORIENTATION:
Making efforts to listen to and understand the customer (both internal and external), anticipating customer needs and giving high priority to customer satisfaction.
1. Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle-perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and what was the outcome.
   | Situation | Action | Result |
SENSITIVITY:
Acting out of consideration for the feelings and needs of others.
1. Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
   Situation  Action  Result
2. Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
   Situation  Action  Result

TABLE OF PERFORMANCE SKILLS

Listed below are key behaviors you may be evaluated on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptability</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Attention to Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Oral</td>
<td>Communication-Written</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>Development of Subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Insight</td>
<td>Equipment Operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact Finding-Oral</td>
<td>Financial Analytical Ability</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Influence</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Organizational Sensitivity</td>
<td>Participative Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and</td>
<td>Practical Learning</td>
<td>Presentation Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Operation</td>
<td>Rapport Building</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Taking</td>
<td>Safety Awareness</td>
<td>Sales Ability/Persuasiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>Strategic Analysis</td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Technical/Professional Knowledge</td>
<td>Technical/Professional Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenacity</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Work Standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATION SYSTEM

An example of a simplistic rating system that may be used to evaluate you while other rating systems are very sophisticated with multiple grading and evaluation systems components:

5. MUCH MORE THAN ACCEPTABLE:
   Significantly above criteria required for successful job performance

4. MORE THAN ACCEPTABLE:
   Generally exceeds criteria relative to quality and quantity of behavior required.

3. ACCEPTABLE:
   Meets criteria relative to quality and quantity of behavior required.

2. LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE:
   Generally does not meet criteria relative to quality and quantity of behavior required.

1. MUCH LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE:
   Significantly below criteria required for successful job performance.
Behavioral Interviewing Story

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique (often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

*Sample SAR story:*

**Situation (S):**
Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, *the Stetson Reporter*, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

**Action (A):**
I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of *Reporter* circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

**Result (R):**
We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent [quantities are always good] over the same period last year.

STAR Interviewing Technique

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique, as outlined below. (This technique is often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

Read up on the technique, and then try it out with our list of sample behavioral interview questions. Read one SAR Story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Situation or Task</strong></th>
<th>Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action you took</strong></td>
<td>Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results you achieved</strong></td>
<td>What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Behavior Tips
Part 1: How to Act Before Interviews
Attire, body language and manners count big time for interviews, yet surveys show that job candidates' manners and other professionalisms are on the decline. For example, according to Vault.com, nearly 80 percent of employers surveyed indicated that interviewing manners had declined to some degree. Some candidates surveyed thought that certain inappropriate behavior was okay, like removing one's shoes or bringing a pet. Among other bizarre behaviors, FacilitatorGuy reported that a candidate ate a hamburger and french fries in the interviewer's office, and even wiped up ketchup with her sleeve. Another interrupted the interview to phone his shrink for advice on how to answer specific questions. Job Searching Guide Alison Doyle wrote that one of her interviewees unbuttoned his shirt and started to drop his britches, to show her the scar from a boat propeller as proof that an unemployed period wasn't his fault! Needless to say, Alison didn't offer him the accounting job. She also didn't offer it to "...the young lady in a bright red skirt so short and tight that she could hardly sit down." Below are tips on how to act before, during and after interviews. (Link to Related Resources in the sidebar.) You might think that some of these are no-brainers and others are a tad cynical in tone, but, as you've seen above, crazy stuff really does happen!

Before Interviews
- Do your homework: Research the company before you interview.
- With a friend, relative or by yourself, practice answering the typical questions interviewers ask.
- Neatly arrange and carry your papers and work samples in a nice briefcase or portfolio. This makes you look organized and professional.
- Practice good hygiene, comb or brush your hair, and dress appropriately. Even if you know that the company dress is business-casual (typical these days), dress up anyway. It shows professionalism and respect. Dress conservatively and avoid bright, flashy colors. If you're a male, wear a business suit or at least a tie with a pressed dress shirt and slacks, and polished dress shoes. Get a professional haircut if you need it. If you're a female, wear a business suit with polished, low-heeled shoes and minimum jewelry, and style your hair tastefully. For some of you younger folks, facial jewelry, paganish attire, purple-streaked hair and liver-colored lipstick may be cool for espresso cafés, but, they are not yet cool for interviewing in the still relatively-conservative corporate environment. With baby-boomers populating the bulk of the workforce these days, you'll likely be interviewing with "uncool" parents who might frown on such with their own kids. Land the job first.
- Don't wear strong perfume or cologne. Fragrance is a matter of personal preference and your interviewer might not like your choice. It's better to have no smell at all. A few minutes before the interview, a little breath spray might not hurt, but, don't wreak of it or use it during the interview.
• Unless otherwise instructed (e.g., to fill out a job application), arrive about ten minutes early for the interview. This shows that you are eager and punctual. Don't be too early, as it might be an inconvenience for your interviewers. Definitely don't be late.
• Don't bring uninvited guests, like pets, children or significant others.
• Turn off your cell phone, pager and any device that issues sounds.
Part 2: How to Act During Interviews

During Interviews

- Smile, offer a firm handshake immediately, introduce yourself, and say something like, "I'm pleased to meet you." or "I've been looking forward to talking with you." Be sincere, not phony or cool, and put the homeboy greetings and other contemporary coolness on a back burner. While "Dude! Wassup?" might be cool among your young friends, it's likely not among corporate interviewers. Take the polite, conservative route.
- Read the mood. If the interviewer is formal, then you probably should be, too. If the interviewer is casual, then follow along while remaining courteous and professional. In either case, try to appear to be relaxed, but, not too relaxed. It's not a good idea to like put your feet up on the interviewer's desk!
- Wait to be told to take a seat or ask if you may, then say thank you. This shows good manners.
- If it's possible without making a commotion, scoot your chair a little closer to the interviewer's desk or take the chair closest to the desk, like you're ready to dive right in. This shows confidence. But, don't invade the interviewer's personal space (a perimeter of about two feet by USA standards).
- Sit with good posture. If you don't know what to do with your hands, keep them folded in your lap. This is another indication of good manners. Avoid crossing your arms over your chest, as it subliminally demonstrates a closed mind to some.
- Even formally-trained interviewers are regular people like you, so they'll expect you to be a little nervous while sitting in the hot seat. Still, try to avoid obvious signs like fidgeting.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Avoid staring or you might make the interviewer uncomfortable, but, don't look away too often either. To some, failure to maintain a comfortable level of eye contact indicates that you are lying, reaching for answers or lacking confidence.
- Don't eat, drink, chew gum or smoke, or even ask if it's okay. But, if the interviewer offers coffee or other beverages, it's okay to accept. It's probably better to say no thanks to snacks (unless you're at an interview luncheon), so you don't accidentally drop crumbs in your lap, be forced to talk with your mouth full, and all that other stuff your mom told you not to do with your food.
- Typically, you'll negotiate salary, benefits, perks and such in a follow-up interview. Regardless, don't bring it up until asked, yet be ready to discuss it at anytime. Benefits and perks are usually a package deal, but, salary isn't. There are lots of salary surveys on the Net you can research, to have a figure in mind.
Part 3: How to Act After Interviews

After Interviews

- Immediately send a thank-you letter to each of your interviewers. Sending thank-you letters is professional and courteous, and will help to make you stand out in the minds of the interviewers. Besides, many interviewers expect it. Email is perfectly acceptable these days, and the quickest way to get your thank-you letters in front of interviewers. Avoid Net informal stuff, like emoticons (e.g., happy faces), shorthand and acronyms (e.g., u for you and TIA for thanks in advance). Whether you send it by email or regular mail, observe professional business-letter standards.

- Be prepared to attend two or three interviews at the same company. If you're called back for another interview, it means that they're interested in you. But, they're also narrowing the competition, so keep up the good work!

- If you don't hear from your interviewers in about a week or 24 hours or so after they said you'd hear from them, it's okay to call or send letters of inquiry, asking about your candidate status. One round of calls or letters is sufficient. Don't pester, as the squeaky wheel doesn't always get the oil in this case. If they're interested in you, they'll contact you without prodding, but, it doesn't hurt to make sure your candidacy didn't fall through the corporate cracks. It also shows that you really want the job and are eager to start. If, after you prod them a tad, you still don't hear back from them, write them off and concentrate on the next job interview.