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White Paper

How to Become a Behavioral Interview Ninja

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How to Become a Behavioral Interview Ninja

About Behavioral Interviewing

Past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. That's the premise behind behavioral interviewing. Asking candidates to discuss why and how they've done things previously is an interviewing staple.

But a new trend in behavioral interviewing is drilling down a few levels deeper to uncover candidate motivations, personality traits and capabilities in the areas of creativity, collaboration and innovation.

In a competitive economy, human capital is a competitive edge, and hiring that competitive edge is the goal of in-depth behavioral interviewing.

To find and hire the most qualified candidates who are also the best culture fit, use in-depth behavioral interviewing. Don't be afraid to cut out the boring parts of the interview process and skip ahead to the meat of the matter, really getting to know the candidate.

Skip Predictable and Traditional

When you need to cut through the B and C candidates and identify the A-list-quality prospective hires, don't use predictable and traditional behavioral interview questions. Forget about questions like "Where do you want to be in five years?" and prepare questions directly related to the opening you have, such as "How have you motivated someone who wasn't doing the job?" for a production line manager position.

Identify the qualities most desired for the person in the position by talking to people who will be working with the new hire, and analyzing previous employees in the position and why they worked out or didn't. Use that information in the interview.

For example, if you are trying to fill a position for a Java developer, and the position is open because the previous employee was very good at programming but couldn't collaborate well or perform well in groups, focus interview questions on asking the candidate to explain how he or she has worked collaboratively, whether or not it is a preferred way to work, what was accomplished by collaborating, etc.

Use Your Employer Brand and Company Culture

If you have or are trying to develop a collaborative corporate culture to foster innovation and drive profitable product and service development, incorporate discussion of and questions about those aspects of your business into behavioral interviewing.

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- Ask the candidate's opinions about how teams should work together to achieve common goals.
- Ask how highly skilled work groups complete projects and candidate thoughts about what drives business growth and profits.
- If your employer brand includes an emphasis on giving back through volunteering, talk to the candidate about that and ask about experience volunteering, favorite charities, non-profit groups or social issues.

Using your employer brand and company culture in the behavioral interview not only provides a lot of material to stimulate conversation and elicit information, it will clearly show if there is a good culture fit.

Ask For A Demonstration

In "Guerilla Marketing for Job Hunters 3.0," Jay Conrad Levinson and David E. Perry teach today's job hunters how to stand out in a hyper-competitive job market by developing a personal brand, leveraging social media and networking and demonstrating their skills and achievements for prospective employers.

- A lot of what they advise job hunters can be turned around and used by hiring managers and recruiters in next-level behavioral interviewing.
- If it's not already obvious, ask your candidates what their personal brand is, how and why they chose it and how it will matter in the position with your company.
- Ask about their understanding and use of social media, what they know about networking, and how they would use it in their career.
- Have them come prepared for a "working interview" in which they will perform some aspect of the open position with you so you can see their skills and experience first-hand.

About Behavioral Interviewing Questions

Once a hiring manager or recruiter has screened resumes and applicants and identified quality candidates, it's time to get to know them better in an interview. Using behavioral interviewing questions enables recruiters and hiring managers to find out about candidates' work ethos, their approaches to different work situations, how they make decisions, and more intellectual, emotional, and personal information about the candidate regarding work and work experience.

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Whether the candidates come to the interviewer's location or interview through recorded video or video conference, the quality of the questions asked will determine the quality of the information the recruiter gets.

Whereas typical interviews include questions about the candidate's work history, training and education, and career interests and aspirations, behavioral interviews, also called S.T.A.R. interviews, can yield a better crop of candidates because they use more in-depth and targeted questions than typical interview questions.

The S.T.A.R. interview format involves asking candidates about work-related **Situations** and the **Tasks**, **Actions**, and **Results** achieved. An interviewer might ask a candidate to talk about a situation at work and the tasks involved, the actions taken to achieve the tasks, and the results or outcomes.

3 Top Behavioral Interview Questions

Effective behavioral interview questions reveal candidate skill levels, work ethic, competence, attitudes, and work style. Three top behavioral interview questions ask about working under pressure, making mistakes, and goals.

1. Tell Me About How You Worked Effectively Under Pressure

One of the best behavioral interview questions is "Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure."

It's designed to reveal what kind of challenging work situations the candidate has been in and how the candidate defines work pressure.

Companion questions to questions about working under pressure include:

- "How did you feel when working under pressure?"
- "Can you give some examples of situations in which you had problems working under pressure?"
- "How and when do you decide to ask for assistance when under pressure?"

2. Have You Ever Made a Mistake at Work? What Happened and What Did You Do About it?

Another great behavioral interview question is "Have you ever made a mistake at work? What happened, and what did you do about it?"

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Everyone makes mistakes, but what's important is how they handle them.

This question gives the candidate the opportunity to be honest and explain what was learned by making a mistake. It reveals a candidate's ability to admit fault, take responsibility, and be humble when faced with the consequences of an error.

3. Give an Example of a Goal You Reached and How You Achieved It

Understanding expectations and goals and working within timeframes and deadlines are important in project work and teamwork, as well as in departments and small workgroups.

The ability to set and meet goals and understand expectations is very important in any candidate.

Behavioral interview questions about goals include:

- “Give an example of a goal you reached at work and how you achieved it.”
- “What kinds of situations have you worked in and achieved multiple goals?”
- “Tell me about a situation in which you were not able to achieve a work goal that was set by a manager”
- “Tell me about a situation in which you had to depend on others to help you achieve a goal”

More Insightful Behavioral Interview Questions

“Tell me about yourself” is a common interview question, but is very general and almost vague.

Well-crafted behavioral interview questions reveal more in-depth information about how a candidate thinks and feels and what type of experience the candidate has from previous jobs.

“Tell me about a time when your work was so enjoyable it didn’t feel like work” or “Tell me what kind of person you are and what your work style is” are both questions that elicit specific personal and work-related information.

More great behavioral interview questions include:

- “Tell me about a decision you made at work that wasn’t popular and how you handled it.”
- “Describe a team you worked on and your role.”
- “Tell me about a time at work when you disagreed with someone. What did you do about it?”
- “Tell me about a time you motivated employees or co-workers.”
- “Tell me about a time when you have gone above and beyond your work expectations”
- “What was the most uncomfortable, embarrassing, or difficult thing you’ve had to do at work?”

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The best interview questions relate to the work the candidate would be doing in the position, and can be tailored to the position.

For example, if you're interviewing software programmers, ask questions about when they made a coding mistake and how they handled it and if they missed a programming project goal and what they did about it.

Questions To Identify Passion (or Lack of It)

Skills and experience are just half of the quality hiring equation. Recruiters and employers hiring in a competitive job market and challenging economy must uncover top candidates and their passions through behavioral interviewing.

Asking about interests, both career and personal, reveals passion (or lack of it) and that extra quality that employers want and need in employees to be competitive and profitable.

Interesting interview questions designed to identify passion include:

- “Tell me about a project, assignment, or customer that engaged all your skills and experience and that you truly enjoyed.”
- “Do you have any hobbies that you’ve enjoyed for more than a few years?”
- “Is there anything you liked when you were a kid that you enjoy as an adult?”

Culture Fit Questions

Culture fit is as important to employers as skills and experience, especially those with unique cultures that they have worked hard to develop and maintain. Incorporating behavioral interviewing questions about culture fit gives unique insights into whether or not candidates will work well within the company culture.

Sometimes it's easy to tell if a candidate is not going to be a culture fit, such as a candidate with the required skills but without any social media interest or experience who is interviewing for a position in a young and growing company that uses social media for everything from recruiting to customer service to sales and marketing.

Using interesting behavioral interview questions, including well-crafted culture fit questions, can help determine if candidates will truly fit in with the company's values, work environment, and business objectives.

- “What kind of customer service philosophies were there at previous employers, and what did you think about them?”

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- “What is your opinion of social media? Do you have a favorite social media platform?”
- “Have you worked in a collaborative manner in any previous jobs? Explain how and what you think of collaborative work groups.”
- “Have you worked toward an employer’s mission? What kinds of things did you do to fulfill an employer mission?”

Case Study Questions

A highly effective way to conduct behavioral interviews involves the use of case study questions. These involve presenting a particular business problem to the candidate and asking them for their opinions about how the problem developed and their suggestions to solve it or eliminate it.

Discussing case study questions reveals a candidate’s creativity, abilities to approach complex business problems, and understanding of business needs.

Behavioral interview questions incorporating case studies could be:

- “Considering the case study we just presented, what would you do upon first finding out about this situation?”
- “Do you have any ideas about how to prevent this kind of problem in the future?”
- “Do you think this problem is common, unique to our company, or a one-time anomaly?”

Preparing Behavioral Interview Questions

Before you conduct an interview, prepare your behavioral interviewing questions.

Determine what competencies are required for the position by using a job description and performance evaluation, talking to people who are currently in the same position, talking to HR about the opening, and talking to people who interact with the person in the position.

Look closely at why the position is open. Is it a vacant position because of turnover? Is it a new position because of growth? Find out what the expectations are for the person in the position, what failures have been experienced by others in the position, and what others in the company think about the position and the person who will be in it.

Develop specific questions for the interview from the information you’ve found, remembering S.T.A.R.: situations, tasks, actions, results.

Use behavioral interviewing to elicit real information about how candidate’s work, how they feel about work, and what their work styles are to get the best match for your openings.