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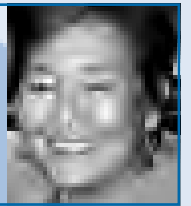
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by JACKIE DAVID, Public Information Director, Public Safety Division, Personnel



Take Guesswork Out Of Behavioral Interviews



INTERVIEW SKILLS, PART 2: Behavioral Questions

You've finally settled into your chair to face your interviewers and the battery of questions for which you have prepared. You've done your homework. You know about the job and the company or department. You've mapped out your answers to all the usual questions and have even engaged in a mock interview. You are ready.

The panel smiles and asks "traditional questions" number one and two. You smile back. You breeze through the questions. You're looking good. Your confidence swells. The panel smiles again and without warning, throws you a curveball. You're not quite sure what hit you. They are now asking a succession of questions like:

- Think about a difficult co-worker, boss or other person. What made this person difficult? How did you successfully interact with this person?
- Talk about a complex problem and how you solved it. Describe any different perspectives or approaches you used to solve the problem.
- Describe a situation wherein you were not pleased with the outcome of a project that you were in charge of. What could you have changed? What did you learn?
- How do you determine priorities? Describe a situation wherein you missed a deadline. What did you learn?
- Describe a situation wherein you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

Time out!

These are called behavioral interview questions and have, in many instances, replaced and/or supplemented traditional interview questions.

Traditional interview questions are résumé-focused and are used to evaluate skills, capabilities and levels of experience. Behavioral interview questions, on the other hand, focus on the candidate's behavior based on the

premise that "the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation."

Rather than focusing on your résumé, an interviewer may instead ask you open-ended, close-ended, theoretical or leading questions. They may also use the dreaded "why" questions.

So, now what do you do? Can you prepare for a behavioral interview? Just its very name conjures up punishment-type pain.

Thankfully, there is a way to successfully and, for the most part, painlessly handle behavioral interviews:

- The first step is, as in all things, to "know thyself." Look at your background and figure out what skills you do have that you can relate to those required for the job or position. What are your top "selling" skills?
- Next, analyze the skills required for the position you are applying for. In other words, "know the position."
- Always give concrete examples of how you demonstrated your skills in past experiences. If you can, quantify your results to add to your credibility.
- Learn how to tell a story that has, as with all stories, a beginning, a middle and an end. State the problem or situation at the beginning of your story. Talk about the action you took to address the problem or situation for the middle part of your story. Conclude your story with the result of your action. Be careful not to go off on a tangent or ramble on when telling your story.
- Finally, just as with traditional interviews, you can practice telling your behavioral stories. Think up past experiences, personal or professional, wherein you used the very skills the job you are interviewing for requires. Write them down. Practice telling them.

This being accomplished, you go on with your interview. The panel is still smiling. There are no curveballs. You are grinning from ear to ear as you confidently thank the panel for their time. They thank you for yours. You've aced the interview. You know it. They know it, too.

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