

Situational/Behavioral Interview Questions and Techniques

Employers often want to know how a candidate will behave in certain situations, so they may ask several situational/behavioral interview questions. These types of questions come in two forms – asking the candidate about a hypothetical situation or asking the candidate to give an example of how they behaved when presented with a similar situation in the past. Either way, give a specific example from a past experience if you can think of one.

In order to prepare for behavior-based interview questions:

- Reflect on your past experiences (work experience, internships, class projects, athletics, activities, volunteer experience, etc.), and identify five to seven experiences where you demonstrated skills that employers generally look for in candidates.
- Think about examples from past experiences that start out both positively and negatively – but that either end with a positive outcome or a learning/growing experience.
- Vary the examples you select. For example, they should not all come from one job you had in the past.
- Ensure your examples are recent. Avoid using examples from high school if you're a junior or senior college student, for example.

By taking the time ahead of time to select several examples from your past experiences, you will be better prepared to answer the situational and behavioral interview questions you may be asked in an interview. The examples you select will often work for more than one behavioral interview question. For example, you could likely use the same example for a question about effective communication and a question about teamwork. You will, of course, not want to use the same example for every question they ask, but this will give you some flexibility in answering the interviewer's questions.

The following is a description of the **STAR approach**, a behavioral interview technique for answering these questions. It is recommended that you follow the letters in order when describing an example.

Situation or Task (ST): Describe the situation that you were in and the task that you were tasked with completing. Give the employer enough details for him or her to understand the context.

Action (A): Next, describe the action you took to complete the task. Even if you are discussing a task that you worked on as a team, focus on yourself and the action that you took as part of the team to complete the task.

Result (R): Next, do not forget to explain the results of your action. What happened? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

The following are some examples of situational/behavioral questions:

- Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with a coworker.
- Please give me an example of a time you had to handle many projects at once.
- Describe a time when you failed at something. What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure.
- Give me an example of a project you had to work on as a team.
- Give me an example of a goal you set for yourself in the past and how you reached it.