

Five Guidelines for a Strong Job Interview

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Article Published in MSN Careers – CareerBuilder.com

In today's competitive landscape, preparation is your best resource. What will I wear to the interview? What questions should I prepare? What research have I done on this organization? Do I know anything about the hiring manager or team? What do the financials of the company look like? Are there any recent articles about their products, people or projects?

Answers to these questions will give you solid information and key insight to landing an offer. But don't stop there -- know how to answer behavioral-based interview questions, and you will stand out from your competition.

Behavioral Basics

Behavioral-based interview questions are focused on bringing specific past projects, accomplishments and failures to light. Employers look for key past behaviors. With the notion that past behaviors are a strong indicator of future behaviors, the hiring managers in today's marketplace will probe deep into your business life to see if you match up. The more recent the story about your career, the more relevant it will be in the mind of the interviewer. Use "I" versus "we" when telling your past story. They are interested in your contributions and business behaviors, not someone else's.

Here are five key basics to know when answering behavioral-based questions:

1. Think like you're in your college English course.

Using the **STAR** format (Situation, Task, Action, Result) when answering a behavioral-based question is much like writing an English paper. You need an Introduction (Situation or Task), the Body (Actions) and a Conclusion (Result).

- The **Situation** or **Task** is the set up for your response, giving the hiring manager details of the story you are about to tell (When? Where? Who was involved?).
- The **Actions** or behaviors that you demonstrated are why this type of question is asked. What did you specifically do? How did you handle this task? If you made a mistake, did you learn from it and avoid repeating it?
- The **Results** must be measurable. Use percentages, dollar amounts, unit numbers, etc., to solidify a specific result. Remember, these stories are all reference checkable, as they actually occurred sometime in the past, so be certain to check your facts first.

2. Perform a dress rehearsal.

Write down specific behavioral-based questions that you may hear, and role-play with someone who will give you "tough love" in return. This will keep your stories to a minimum, keep you focused on using the STAR format, and give you the necessary confidence to make that all-important positive impression.

3. It's OK to pause before answering.

Preparation works well for behavioral-based questions, however, you may hear a question that you didn't expect. Ask for a moment to collect your thoughts, and then follow the STAR format to respond to the question.

4. Avoid tangents.

It's easy to keep talking about your past successes and accomplishments. Be warned, too many times the Interviewee keeps adding on to their story. Once you have provided the specific and measurable Results, stop talking. The interviewer will probe further if more information is required.

5. Do not answer with an opinion, a theory or a vague response.

Behavioral-based questions are targeting your past. Your opinion is simply your view or belief, and offers no detail around what you did on the job. A theoretical response carries no weight, as it is not valid experience. A vague response keeps the hiring manager guessing, and most likely probing further to extract the information that they are after.

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