



Planning your next career move...

MODULE 2: The Interview - tips & advice

MODULE 2.2:

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

As part of a structured interview you are likely to be asked Behavioural Questions to test specific competencies required for the role. These are the questions that start with:

- "Tell me about a time when..."
- Give me an example of a situation where..."
- "Describe a situation at work where..."

The interviewer will be looking for you to answer this question with a specific example from your past work history. A good way to frame your answer is to use the ST/AR formula. Firstly describe the Situation or Task you were faced with, then describe the Action you took in this situation and finally describe the Result or outcome.

In these questions, the interviewer will be assessing your competency in particular areas. For example, if they were trying to assess your Planning and Prioritising skills, they may ask a question like 'Tell me about a time when you have several urgent and important tasks to complete that had conflicting deadlines'. They will be looking for context of the situation, what steps you took to manage your workload, how you decided what was most important, who else you needed to communicate with, what happened to each deadline and what impact this pressure had on you. They will also want to know the final outcome.

When asked a behavioural question, there are a number of steps you go through, which you may or may not be conscious of:

- Firstly you hear the question
- Then you access your memory bank (looking for examples). Usually you will look up or away whilst you are doing this.
- Once you have accessed your memory, you may have identified more than one example, so in your mind, you will run through each scenario to see which one paints you in the most favourable light.
- Once you have selected the example you are going to use, you then play the whole thing through in your mind before you resume eye contact and answer the question.
- This can be almost instant or it may take a little while (up to 30 seconds). This is normal. Don't be scared to ask the interviewer to repeat the question if you are not sure of what they are looking for.

The key to providing good answers to behavioural questions is to:

- Be specific - talk about one specific time
- Ensure your response is always in past tense - ie what you did, not what you would do. The interviewer is looking for past behaviour as an indicator of future performance. They are not looking for a hypothetical answer.
- Be honest! If you try to fabricate an answer to a behavioural question, a skilled interviewer will catch you out in their probing or follow up questions.

MOST COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1) Tell me about yourself.

Prepare yourself an 'elevator pitch'. That is a brief (maximum two minutes) overview of who you are, what your background is and something personal about yourself (ie interests outside of work) to give a balanced view. Your answer should relate to job opening and what you can do for your employer.

2) What do you know about our organisation?

Give your interviewer an indication that you have done some research. They already know about their organisation so there's no point in regurgitating the information verbatim to them. Also state that you are keen to hear any other relevant and appropriate information that perhaps is not so readily available in the public domain.

3) What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

Relate past experiences which represent success in solving problems which may be similar to those of prospective employer.

4) Why should we hire you?

Capitalise on your strengths and your personal attributes that set you apart from others. Make sure these related to the organisation and/or the role. This is not the time to bring up any quirky personal traits!

5) What do you look for in a job?

6) What are your long term career plans?

7) We have a concern that you may be over qualified/too experienced for this position and that you may get bored quickly?

Emphasise interest in long-term association, one of their concerns is you will move on quickly if the role isn't challenging enough. You can also point out the Employer will get a faster return on their investment because you have more experience than required.

8) How do you feel about moving into team management roles?

9) What do you see as the most difficult task in being a supervisor/manager/leader?

Try to think of examples of where you have successfully led or managed others that shows your potential in this area. If you have had formal supervisory/management responsibilities you may be able to call on examples of when you have had to show someone how to perform a new task etc.

10) Why are you leaving your present job?

Give a "group" answer if possible (ie. our office is closing). Think about your reasons for leaving before your interview and stick to one response - don't change answers during the interview! Remember your referees may be asked to recall your reasons for leaving as well so be honest with this or you may get caught out. If it is simply for 'more challenge', expand on this because it could mean different things to different people.

11) Describe an ideal working environment for you?

This is a place where you can bring in some of the "satisfiers" and "ideal job preferences" - but don't make it

sound too sublime or impractical. Otherwise, they may conclude that you are not ready for the realities of the present company.

12) What do you think about your present company?

Try to focus on the positives – it has given you good experience and opportunities to perform.

13) How have you contributed to sales and profits? What did you do?

This is your chance to describe in some detail a business accomplishment that is relevant to the proposed new job.

14) How much financial responsibility have you had to account for?

You can answer this in terms of your budget or head count or the size of the project or sales that you directed.

15) Did you supervise people in your last position?

Be specific and feel free to refer to those over which you had influence such as a task force or a matrix organisation.

16) Can you tell me about some achievements in your career recently?

Be prepared to talk confidently about your achievements. Make sure you are clear on the part you played in achieving the outcomes in case you are questioned on this. Emphasise the positives and don't dwell too much on the negatives.

17) How did you get on with your Manager?

Describe the working relationship you had with them - how much day to day contact you had with them, what they knew about your work & how you found them to work with. Stay factual and avoid negative personal remarks. They are very likely to be a referee so make sure you describe your relationship accurately.

18) How do you work under pressure and deal with deadlines?

I can handle it, it is a way of life in the business world. Be prepared to give examples to back up this claim.

19) If you had your choice of jobs and companies where would you go?

Talk about the job at hand and what is attractive in the company that is interviewing you.

20) What are your salary expectations?

The market value of the job may be the key answer - my understanding is that a job like the one you're describing may be in the range of \$ to \$. Always give a range that you would be prepared to negotiate within depending on how closely the opportunity ticks all of your boxes for your next role. Be realistic as this could be a deal breaker if you overestimate and put yourself out of the running. Be prepared to trade things off to get what is really important to you (eg if they offer training but are paying slightly less than you wanted at first you might still consider this).

21) Why do you want to work for us?

Do some research before your interview so that you know what appeals to you about the organisation (people, culture, products) so that you can talk about where this a potential match from your perspective.

22) What other types of jobs or companies are you considering?

Don't feel obliged to reveal details of your other negotiations. If you have other irons in the fire refer to your campaign in a general way but concentrate mainly on the job at hand. Sometimes having other things on the go can put you into a more competitive situation if they are also keen on you. Be honest about this so you don't blow your chances.

23) How would you describe your personality?

Think about this in advance. Mention 2 or 3 of your useful traits that would paint you in good light and be prepared to back them up with examples if asked.

24) What are your goals?

Relate your answer to the company rather than give a very broad, general answer. Keep your ambitions on a realistic track.

25) What are your strong points?

Present at least three - preferably in a way that relates them to the potential job opening.

26) What are your weak points?

Don't say you have none, give only one. Turn the negative into a positive answer like, "I'm am sometimes impatient and do the work myself when we are late".

27) What sort of relationship do you have with your direct reports, workmates and management?

This is a very important question, and you can well afford to take your time and answer it in steps:

- When talking about your relationships with subordinates be prepared to state your philosophy of handling them, particularly when they have performance problems.
- With regard to managers indicate your keen interest in understanding your boss' expectations and how you would go about keeping your boss informed.

28) Are you planning any further study?

If you are not actually planning further study indicate you would be open to vocational training if required. In certain sectors it is important to keep your education up to date.