

Prepare to win the behavioural interview

As you walk into the interview for your dream job, you're feeling a little nervous, but geared up to tackle whatever comes your way.

SHARON GRAHAM -- Special to Sun Media



Having carefully planned your answers to typical questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" you think that you're as ready as you'll ever be.

The interview starts, and without warning, your interviewer asks a quite unusual and specific question "Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline." You struggle to come up with a good response, and immediately you're hit with "What were the repercussions?" You may not know it, but you have just experienced your first behavioural interview question.

Behavioural interviewing is not new. It has been around for about 20 years. It is a structured interviewing style based on the premise that "past behaviour predicts future performance." Statistics show this approach is five times more accurate in predicting a candidate's ability to do the job than traditional interview styles.

POPULAR TECHNIQUE

The behavioural approach is commonly used by large and mid-sized organizations with Human Resource departments. Moreover, as an increasing number of employers are starting to recognize its value, behavioural interviewing continues to grow in popularity.

Interviewers using this technique will ask specific questions to draw out examples of situations that you have encountered. Prior to the interview, your prospective employer has already identified the skills necessary for the position. The interview questions are then carefully designed to probe into your experiences and uncover the skills you demonstrated. The goal of the interviewer is to determine if your skills are the best match for the position.

You can prepare yourself for a behavioural interview by developing some high-impact stories using the SAR (Situation, Action, Result) technique.

1. First, describe a specific situation or task that you needed to accomplish or resolve. Provide details such as names, dates and places to add credibility to your statement.
2. Next, describe the action you took. Discuss what you specifically did to address the situation.
3. Finally, describe the positive results you achieved. Explain how your organization benefited by your actions. If possible, use numbers to quantify your results.

The first step in developing your SAR statements is to brainstorm your background. Review your resume and identify your best accomplishments. When you prepare your SAR statements, consider the characteristics that may be important to a prospective employer. Think about skills that they may be looking for such as communication, leadership, team building, stress management, initiative, decision-making, and problem solving. Develop a variety of examples from your previous jobs, business events, volunteer work, community service and academic studies.

Your SAR statements should show you in the best light possible. Include some examples of situations that may have started out negatively, but have a positive outcome. You should also have a few stories of

situations where the outcome was not ideal, but you handled yourself well and learned an important lesson. With about 10 interesting stories to tell, you can adapt them to different questions.

Prior to your job interview, investigate the company and position. Review the job description and identify specific skills and abilities that the organization is looking for. Select your SAR statements that meet your prospective employer's needs. Focus on telling a concise and interesting story that will show how you fit the position.

It is best not to write down or memorize your SAR statements. Rather, practise telling your story aloud. Rehearse your SAR statements whenever possible. Practise in front of the mirror. Try out a story with your spouse. Give it a run-through while you're in the shower. This will keep your examples fresh in your mind and you'll continue to find new and interesting ways to deliver them.

TAKE A MOMENT

When you finally face your interviewer, listen carefully to each question being asked. Select your SAR statement that best demonstrates the skills and abilities that the company is looking for. Behavioural questions tend to be challenging and require some thought. So, you should feel comfortable enough to take a moment to consider and select your best example.

Behavioural-type answers are a great way to impress your interviewer in any interview scenario. Your SAR statements will grab the listener's attention and create a lasting positive impression, allowing you to stand apart from the competition.

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