

Answering Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions in interviews are commonplace and give the employer a better understanding of not just what you can do, but how you do it. Answers may indicate level of emotional intelligence, soft skills, learning, and communication styles. The answers will let the employer see how a candidate will fit into the team/company and/or how they will handle situations that may arise on the job. They often start with; tell me about a time, or describe a time.

- Tell me about a time when you showed initiative.
- Describe a time when you were asked to do something you didn't want to do.
- Tell me about a time when there was a communication breakdown at work.

To answer behavioural questions, use stories from your past experiences. Firstly, a story, if told well, will hold the attention of the listener and they will remember more. Secondly, one story could answer many different behaviours – handling stress, time management, working with others, may all be skills showcased in one story. Use the formula below to structure your stories.

Using the STAR formula to answer behavioural questions

Situation	What happened? What was the situation or problem? <i>Short and fact based</i>
Task/Tactic	What did you need to do? Why were you involved? What options did you consider? <i>Short and fact based</i>
Action taken	What did you do? What specific actions did you take? <i>Longest part of your answer. Provide step by step details.</i>
Result	What was the outcome? Who/what benefited from your actions? <i>Detail the benefits and leave them with a positive result.</i>

Tip Sheet: INTERVIEWS – BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

Situation:

The processing time for orders was creating issues. The time between receiving an order and shipping it was too long, and orders were getting backlogged. The backlog was creating overtime problems in the shipping area, and customers were complaining.

Task:

As Department Assistant Manager, I needed to increase ordering efficiency and reduce overtime. Since the problem involved two different staff units and two different ordering systems, both online and phone, it presented logistical and communication challenges.

Action:

First, I initiated a review of the ordering systems. Next, I compiled and analyzed data on order times and shipping backlogs, solicited staff input, and researched alternative ordering systems. I presented my findings and recommendations for an integrated phone-and-online system to management and they approved the new system. I managed the start-up of the new system and organized the training for five staff members.

Results:

As a result, combining the phone and online ordering systems reduced the time between order placement and order shipment by two days and reduced overtime for shipping staff by 20 percent. Our customer complaints also decreased because of the new system.

Start constructing your stories in a STAR format. Practice them to ensure that they are between 1½ to 2½ minutes long. If structured correctly, they will give the interviewer a clear indication of your behaviours and skills. Remember, you are the STAR in the story!