Behavioural Interviews

According to research the "have a chat" interview is about 8% effective at predicting success in a role. Behavioural or competence based interviews with reference checks increase this to around 60%. If Psychometric assessment is added this increases to around 70%.

Behavioural interviews are competency based and reflect the principle that past behaviour predicts future behaviour and/or success. They help to objectively access a candidate's skills and experience for the job. By assessing a candidate's behaviour in a variety of past situations employers are able to determine how the applicant will behave in future situations and therefore how suited they are for their vacancy. Each candidate is asked the same questions, making it far easier for the interviewer to make a comparison at the end of all the interviews.

When faced with a competency based question, the applicant needs to think about and reference examples of specific experiences and events from the past and how they dealt with them. Based on the answer given, the interviewer may probe further asking for explanations about the candidate's response. For example:

Question 1: Tell me about a situation where you had a conflict with your co-worker and how did you resolve it?
Question 2: Looking back, can you think or any other way you could have resolved or prevented the conflict? And how you might handle a similar situation differently in the future?
Question 3: What did you learn from the situation and how might you handle a similar situation differently in the future?

Identifying the Behavioural Questions you will be asked

Before the interview identify the skills and competencies that are important for success in the targeted role. Each question will target a specific skill or competency relevant to the role. For example, for an administration position the skills and competencies would include quality and accuracy, time management, team work; for a management role leadership/management, negotiating and influencing, and financial management. Use this list to pick the competencies specific to the role you are applying for.

Problem Solving & Decision Making
- What has been a problem that you had to deal with in your last job? Tell me about how you analysed the situation, how you defined the key factors, and developed your solutions.
- Describe a time on any job that you have held where you were faced with problems or stresses which tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Planning & Organising
- How did you use planning in your last job in order to be effective for your organisation?
- Describe a system you used for keeping track of multiple projects. How did you track your progress so that you could meet deadlines how do you stay focused?
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give me an example.

Influencing Others

- Give me an example of a time when you had to carefully analyse another person or a situation in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your manager or executive team on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result?

Leadership / Initiative

- Give me an example of a time in which you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates at work.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to make a decision which made you unpopular. How did you handle it?

Teamwork

- Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively 'read' another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their individual needs or values.
- What did you do in your last job to contribute towards a teamwork environment? Be specific.

Conflict Resolution

- Tell me about a situation where you had a conflict with your co-worker and how did you resolve it?
- Looking back, can you think of any other way you could have resolved or prevented the conflict? And how you might handle a similar situation differently in the future?
- What did you learn from the situation and how might you handle a similar situation differently in the future?

Technical

- Describe the most significant written document / report / presentation, which you have had to complete. What are the most difficult aspects? How was it received?
- Describe the most creative work-related project you have carried out.
- Describe a situation in which you had to use research and analysis to develop a strategy or product. What was the objective? What research did you consider or information that you analysed? What was the result?

Creativity/ Motivation/ Goal setting

- Give me an example of a time when you really got motivated at work. What does that experience say about you?
- Give an example of an important goal, which you had to set in the past, and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or team was facing. What was the challenge? What was your role? What role did others play?

Scoring candidates and making the right selection

Employers rate each answer using a rating scale. This allows them to compare the candidate's answers and scores to the skills/competencies that each question is assessing. A common rating scale is a 1-5 rating scale where:

1 Shows little understanding
2 General understanding, but requires greater skill for the job
3 Meets the job requirements
4 Shows above average understanding
5 Shows excellent understanding

Employers not only assess what is said but also monitor body language, tone of voice and attitude, all of which are very important when assessing the answer. It is estimated that 93% of communication is non-verbal.

Preparing your Answers - The STAR Approach

The STAR Approach is widely used to ensure that answers are succinct, to the point and credible.

S: Situation
Describe the situation that you were in or give brief background information. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalised description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand but be succinct. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience or any relevant event.

T: Task
What were you tasked with doing or aiming to achieve? Be specific and brief.

A: Action
Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did - not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might have done, tell what you did.

R: Results
What results did you achieve? What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? What were the benefits of the action to the organisation?
Make sure it is a tangible result. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers always impress employers.

Many behavioural questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or better yet, those that had positive outcomes e.g. a difficult client situation that you turned around.

Preparing for behavioural interviews

- Identify eight to ten examples from your past experience where you demonstrated the key skills listed in the Position Description.
- Some examples should be situations that started out negatively but ended positively.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your work.
- Use fairly recent examples.
- Review your resume - seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory.
- Use the STAR method to describe these.

In the interview, listen carefully to each question, and use an example that provides an appropriate description of how you demonstrated the desired behaviour.

**With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of
different behavioural questions.**

Good luck!