

ANSWERING BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Recruiters use “behavioral based” questions to evaluate how a candidate handled a past situation or task. The candidate’s past behaviors may be used to help predict future behaviors, and determine the likelihood of a candidate’s success in the position. Answering behavioral based questions is like telling a story. Here is a strategy you can use to ensure you answer the question thoroughly. Use the **STAR** method, which stands for **Situation or Task, Action, and Result**.

Situation or Task

Based on the question, describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand what is going on. Take about 15 seconds for this part.

Action

Describe the actions you took in detail, illustrating the skills you used. This should not be a hypothetical situation, so don’t explain what you *might* do, describe what you actually did. And 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. The “Action” is the most important part of your answer, so spend at least 45 - 60 seconds on this part.

Results

How did the situation end? What happened? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? It should obviously be a “happy” ending. Wrap it up in 15 – 20 seconds.

Here is a shortened example of how this works. Your answer should be no less than one-minute long.

Interview Question: “Describe a situation in which you had to handle an upset customer.”

*Possible answer: (**State situation**) “I had a situation just last week. I am a sales associate at an apparel store in the mall. We were having our summer sale, and one of our regular customers was upset that we didn’t have the outfit she wanted in her size. (**Action**) She was clearly very angry, so I let her express her disappointment. I reassured her I would do everything I could to help. I contacted one of our other stores in the area to see if they had the outfit in the size she was looking for. They did, so I asked them to have the company delivery truck bring it to our store the following morning. I told the customer we would have it the next day and that I would personally call her when it arrived. (**Result**) By this time, she had already calmed down quite a bit. She thanked me for all the extra effort, and even ended up buying over \$300 in clothes that day!”*

The type of example you use will depend on the interview question, but it is preferable to draw mostly upon previous work experiences. You can also use examples from college (class and extracurricular) and volunteer experiences. Typically, only use personal experiences as a last resort.

General interview preparation: Now that you know how the STAR strategy works, refer to the “Common Interview Questions” section for a list of sample behavioral interview questions.

In preparation for an interview for a specific job, review the job posting and assume you will be asked behavioral based questions about all aspects of the duties of the position.