



Behavioral and Case Interviewing

Part I: What are Behavioral and Case Interviews?

A. Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral questions assume that past behavior predicts future performance. So, these questions ask you to describe concrete examples of how you have demonstrated a given skill. Compare these two standard interview questions with the behavioral questions below them: You'll see why more employers are adopting the behavioral approach.

Traditional Interview Questions:

- 1) How would you say you deal with conflict?
- 2) Tell me a little bit about your views on how to effectively manage organizational finances?

Behavioral Interview Questions:

- 1) Give me an example of a time you had a conflict with a supervisor and how you resolved that conflict?
- 2) Can you share an example of an instance in which you contributed to a decision that saved an organization money? Tell me about your reasoning process, and how much money did you save?

B. Case Interviewing

This type of interview question is hypothetical and future-focused. This format is particularly popular with management consulting firms, investment banks, or other companies looking for strong analytical skills. In a case interview, you are presented with hypothetical—but often very concrete and practical—problems or situations commonly encountered in your field. Here's an example:

Our client recruits graduating college seniors for entry-level positions in locations around the world. It currently hires and places 500 graduates per year but would like to triple in size over the next ten years while maintaining quality. Assume that the increase must all come from hiring graduating seniors. (In an actual case, you may not be given this and other assumptions unless you ask.)

The client's current recruiting budget is \$2 million annually, and while it is in a strong financial position, it would like to spend as few additional resources as possible on recruiting. The company's goal is to double the number of recruits while maintaining their quality with minimal increase in resources expended. You have been asked to advise the client on what steps it will need to take in order to meet its growth targets, while staying within its budget constraints.

What options does the organization have at its disposal to achieve its growth goal?

Part II: Answering Behavioral and Case Interview Questions

A. Behavioral Questions

The key to answering behavioral questions is preparation. Review your resume, search your memory, and develop stories of specific experiences and accomplishments. The STAR technique is an easy way to describe your successful past performances. STAR is an acronym: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. When you use an example to answer a behavioral question, explain the situation or context of your example, the task (s) or your responsibility for action, the action you took, and finally the outcomes or results of your behavior. Take a look at STAR in action:

Q: “Give me an example of a time when you were a leader”

Situation: My service organization was in danger of losing its charter at the university. Membership was down and funds were quite low.

Task: As fundraising chairperson, I was responsible for increasing donations by 25% percent.

Action: In order to accomplish my goal, I initiated a door-to-door off-campus campaign. All members were involved in the fundraising effort.

Result: Thanks to our membership’s dedication and participation, we increased donations by 30%.

B. Case Study Questions

Listen to the case question. It may be formatted as a calculation/estimation/ numerical/market sizing case; a problem case, probing case, or business operations case; business strategy case; or a brainteaser/logical puzzle. Regardless of the type of case, the employer is interested in knowing how you analyze information to deduce an answer. It is important that you talk your way through the case study, ask questions, and construct a logical framework that leads to helpful practical recommendations.

Here are some possible responses to the case question described on page one of this sheet.

Q: What options does the organization have at its disposal to achieve its growth goal?

A: Attract more applicants at the same cost

- Review the list of campuses targeted (e.g., optimize resource allocation across schools). The review may result in adding certain higher potential campuses and eliminating other ones that appear to have more limited potential.
- Review recruiting approach at each campus (e.g., optimize cost-effectiveness of messages and approaches at each school).

Extend offers to a higher percentage of applicants while maintaining quality (e.g., reduce the number of people who are turned down who would have performed equally well in the job)

Improve acceptance rates among offerees (e.g., better communicate the benefits of the job relative to alternatives or improve the attractiveness of the job relative to alternatives).

Part III: “So, what’s the Best Answer?”

There are many possible “correct” answers to behavioral and case study interview questions. The key is your attitude, composure, and ability to think on your feet in a logical, articulate manner. For each question, see through the specifics and get to the heart of the matter. Focus on the core structure of a good response (the critical process issues you’re being asked to address); then fill in the specific content. Keep in mind that the typical candidate will not be able to cover all relevant response possibilities in the allotted time. Just remember that there is no single right answer, but there are more effective processes for uncovering the underlying issues.

Information and Sample Questions Adapted from:

- Bain & Company (<http://www.bain.com>)
- The Boston Consulting Group (<http://www.bcg.com>)
- McKinsey & Company (<http://www.mckinsey.com>)

You can find additional sample case and behavioral interview questions and the above websites and also at:

http://www.quintcareers.com/case_interviews.html

<http://www.job-interview.net/Bank/QCaseInterview.htm>

<http://www.capitalone.com/careers/caseindex.shtml>