

Behavioral Interviews

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Caveat

This is a simple introduction to a complex topic. For more information, see the Resources slide at the end of this talk.

What's the best predictor of future behavior?



**Past performance in similar situation.
Sort of.**

Sharing Scaries

What has gone wrong in your interviewer or interviewee experiences?

- Filtered out good candidates?
- Hired whackos or fakes?
- Didn't get a job you could have rocked?
- Got a job that was way over your head?

History--unstructured

Alfred Binet, 1919, assessed kids' intelligence with interviews by three teachers. They contradicted each other.

H.L. Hollingsworth, 1922, used interviews to rank Army applicants. Officers' rankings contradicted each other (#1 > #57)

We studied the problem

Adding structure increased validity:

- Giving managers job descriptions helped them ignore irrelevant details.
- Asking the same questions of each applicant improved validity.
- Most improvement: 1980, Latham, Saari, Pursell, and Campion used *critical incidents* questions.

Situational Interviewing

Asking an interviewee about critical incidents is situational interviewing. Most of us are familiar with this:

- How do you ensure accuracy of your work?
- What's the most important skill a technical writer can have?

The Problem?



What's the best predictor of future behavior?



Past performance in similar situation.
How to assess?

Just ask!

Behavioral interviewing:

- Based on situational interviewing, which asks about critical incidents: "what would you do if..."
- Focused on actual behavior: "Tell me about a time when you..."
- Relies on the Deep Dive to flush out Miss America answers

Hypothetical Example

- Tell me about a time when you had trouble with a coworker, and how you resolved it.
- Oh, you locked him in a closet? Then what happened?



Actual Example

How do you know what to write?

I interview customers to identify the audience.

Tell me about a time when you did that?

Oh. I've never actually DONE that...

Comparing styles...

Unfocused

- "Miss America" responses that may not reflect reality
- No platform for probing

Behavior focused

- No such thing as the right answer
- Each answer provides platform for deeper dive

Don't Let It Throw You!

Behavioral interviews can feel like an interrogation in which you try harder and harder to give the right answer.

Behavioral interviewers are not looking for the right answer. They are trying to get a full 3-D view of who you really are.

Sales-heavy interviewing styles don't do well.

Let's Practice!

The Scenario

You are applying for a technical writing position. You have to get this job or lose your house, your partner, and your basset hound.

You know there are over 100 applicants for this job.

Interviewer Best Practices

- Ask about specific times -- you may have to remind them.
- Ask about critical incidents that reveal critical competencies.
- Dive deep on every answer, keep asking for more specifics until you know the whole story.
- Ask questions outside the box

Interviewee Best Practices

- Answer the question asked, not the one you expected.
- Groom & review your samples
- Be explicit about what you wrote
- Make resume behavioral
- No right answers!
- Give behavioral answers, not Miss America Answers
- Research the company!
- Review resume to improve recall

Resources

- Background: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Job_interview
- Practical advice:
<http://www.brockport.edu/career/behave.htm>
<http://www.wikihow.com/Prepare-for-a-Behavioral-Interview>
- [Recent scholarly study PDF](#)