

Here's how to ace behavioural interview questions

A favourite amongst job interviewers, behavioural questions are based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour.

Behavioural questions are aimed at finding out how you respond in different situations and how you may handle future challenges.

“Most interviews have at least one behavioural question,” says Manisha Maligaspe, Recruitment Lead for Oceania Transaction Advisory Services at EY. “It doesn’t matter if you’re applying for a junior position, if you’re a graduate or a very experienced individual, behavioural questions are very common.”

The best responses to behavioural questions provide concrete examples of how specific situations may be handled or have previously been resolved. Erin Murray, the HR Manager at the McGrath Foundation, says it’s important for candidates to know what interviewers are looking for when they ask this type of question. “We want to develop an understanding of when you have showcased particular behaviours - not skills,” she says.

The key to responding to behavioural questions

There is a relatively simple way of answering behavioural questions.

“I’m looking for a candidate to answer using the STAR approach,” says Sarah Beck, SEEK’s Director of Talent Acquisition. “STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action and Result.”

- Situation/Task - tell the interviewers about a real situation or task you faced
- Action - detail the action you took
- Result – share the result (“It’s ok if it didn’t go well, as long as you can say what you learned from it,” says Beck)
- Examples of behavioural interview questions

1. At times you will be asked to do many things at once. How do you prioritise your tasks?

While you could answer this question by saying how you might prioritise your tasks, Maligaspe says it’s better to back up your claims. “Use real examples from previous jobs about how you have organised your time,” she says.

You could say:

“In my current position, I am responsible for [detail your responsibilities] and I’ve had to manage [name the tasks you are responsible for]. I take time to plan my day/week and write

down what I need to achieve by the end of the day/week, starting with the urgent tasks first. I break big tasks into smaller ones so I can make progress on different things over the course of the day/week. Using this method means I'm productive and nothing gets overlooked."

2. Tell me about a time you made a mistake or didn't deliver to expectations, what happened? What did you learn?

"This is an important question because it gives the hiring manager an insight into whether the candidate has had experience managing situations they are likely to face in the role or company," says Jodette Cleary, the Chief People Officer with hipages. "I'm looking for real-life examples, not theoretical ones."

3. Can you tell me about the most difficult stakeholder you've had? Why was this the case? How did you make the relationship productive?

This question gives an insight into how you have managed challenging relationships in the past.

You could say:

"I was working with a client who was constantly late for morning meetings and when I tried to finish our appointments on time they would get angry. It meant that I was behind schedule for the rest of the day. I asked the client privately if there was anything I could do to help them get the most out of our time together and they said they were late because they couldn't find a car park in the morning. I organised a car parking pass and they were never late again."

While this is not an exhaustive list of behavioural questions that may get asked in an interview, the above examples show you how questions can be answered using the STAR approach.

Behavioural questions are aimed at uncovering how you acted in a certain situation. By asking this type of question, interviewers are looking for evidence of what you have done in the past and how this may influence your future behaviour at an organisation.

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