

How to survive the Behavioural based interview

Although behavioural based interviews have long been an integral part of interview process, we are still surprised by how often we are asked by our candidates for the best way to approach these types of interviews. To assist with the preparation, it is first useful to consider what is meant by a behavioural based interview.

Behavioural based interviewing is based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best predictor of future performance. It is a probing style of interview, the purpose of which is to discover how you would act in specific employment related situations and that you have experienced the type of problem that you are likely to come across in the role that you are interviewing for. From your answers the interviewer will evaluate your responses to determine your suitability for the role and potential for success.

A traditional interview normally comprises of a number of straight forward questions, such as “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” or “How do you manage your day? These normally require straight forward answers that are not only easy to prepare, but also to give an answer that the interviewer wants to hear. In contrast, a behavioural based question, instead of asking how you would behave in a situation will ask how you did behave in a given situation. Behavioural interview questions will be more probing and more specific than traditional based questions, which makes it much harder to give responses that are untrue or exaggerated. Normally, they will begin with the words, “Tell me about a time when...,” or “Describe a time when you...,” or “Give me an example of a time when...” Behavioural based questions may often be phrased negatively, for example “Give me an example of a time that you made a bad decision...” If this is the case, ensure that you follow up your answer with an explanation of what you learned from the experience, if possible by revealing on of your strengths. Remember that you are there to sell yourself so the answer that you give should always reflect positively on you.

Preparing for the Interview

Like many candidates, you may find the behavioural based interview style daunting. The best way to avoid getting stage fright is to be as prepared as possible. Make sure that you read the job description thoroughly, research the company, and if possible talk to people that work (or have worked at the organisation), as this will help to give you an idea of the particular attributes the company looks for. Look for some sample behavioural based questions on the Internet and identify a number of examples from your past experience that can provide an appropriate response to each. Think of examples that can best demonstrate the most common behaviours and skills that employers generally look for (and of course those that will emphasise your best selling points). Remember that any examples that you give that start out negatively should end positively and/or show that you made the best of a situation and learned from the experience. It is also important to give recent examples.

During the Interview

During the interview, remain calm and always listen carefully to the question. If you don't understand the question, don't be afraid to ask for clarification (this will also buy you a bit more time). If you find that your explanation wasn't as clear as you would have liked, explain what you were hoping to show with your answer, rather than assume that the interviewer understood it. Ask for feedback, as finding out how an interviewer interpreted your response will enable you to correct any misunderstandings and clarify. If you are asked to describe a situation you cannot recall ever being in, think laterally and tell the interviewer what you would do if you found yourself in that situation. The behavioural based interview is like anything, the more experience you gain; the easier it will be to develop a specific technique. Over time you will find that by preparing a small number of examples in preparation to your interview, you will be able to tailor your responses to a number of different questions. Once you can do this, you will no longer find the experience unnerving, but rather see it as an opportunity to emphasise your key achievements and take the next step up on your career ladder.

In summary, there are three key components to keep in mind before undertaking a behavioural based interview.

1. be prepared;
2. keep calm and listen carefully to the question;
3. practice makes perfect.

Good luck! For any further, more detailed advice, please contact your nearest JLegal office.