

The Behavioral question

When presented with behavioral questions beginning with phrases like, "Tell me about a time when" or "Give me an example of," the interviewer wants to hear your real-life examples. When interviewers ask such questions, they are listening for examples of how you handled situations similar to the ones you may handle for this company. This is your chance to talk about your accomplishments. If you can demonstrate through examples (preferably recent ones) that you've succeeded in certain areas of interest, you'll likely be considered a strong candidate for the position. After all, if you did it somewhere else yesterday, you can do it for this company tomorrow.

Your success stories should include the problem, the action you took and the result. Here is an example if you were interviewing for a sales position:

The Problem: I had a customer who did not want to hear about the features of my merchandise because of a prior interaction with my company.

The Action: I listened to her story and made sure I heard her complaint. I then explained how I would have handled the situation differently and how I can offer her better service. I showed her some facts that changed her mind about dealing with the company again.

The Result: She not only bought the merchandise, but also complimented how I handled her account. She is now one of my best customers.

One way to prepare for this type of interview is by writing out your stories before the interview. Determine what stories you have that would be appropriate for the position based on its job description. If the job requires dependability, write your story about a time when your dependability was recognized or made a difference with a customer.

You can use the stories you prepare even when the interviewer does not ask behavioral questions. If you are asked a traditional question, use your prepared story and preface it with, "I can give you an example of a time when I used that skill on a previous job."

Why should we hire you?

The more detail you give, the better your answer will be. This is not a time to talk about what you want. Rather, it is a time to summarize your accomplishments and relate what makes you unique.

Product Inventory Exercise

The bottom line of this question is, "What can you do for this company?"

Start by looking at the job description or posting. What is the employer stressing as requirements of the job? What will it take to get the job done? Make a list of those requirements.

Next, do an inventory to determine what you have to offer as a fit for those requirements. Think of two or three key qualities you have to offer that match those the employer is seeking. Don't underestimate personal traits that make you unique; your energy, personality type, working style and people skills are all very relevant to any job.

The Sales Pitch: You Are the Solution

From the list of requirements, match what you have to offer and merge the two into a summary statement. This is your sales pitch. It should be no more than two minutes long and should stress the traits that make you unique and a good match for the job.

Example

"From our conversations, it sounds as if you're looking for someone to come in and take charge immediately. It also sounds like you are experiencing problems with some of your database systems.

With my seven years of experience working with financial databases, I have saved companies thousands of dollars by streamlining systems. My high energy and quick learning style enable me to hit the ground and size up problems rapidly. My colleagues would tell you I'm a team player who maintains a positive attitude and outlook. I have the ability to stay focused in stressful situations and can be counted on when the going gets tough. I'm confident I would be a great addition to your team."

What Makes You Unique?

Completing an exercise around this question will allow you to concentrate on your unique qualities. Like snowflakes, no two people are alike. Take some time to think about what sets you apart from others.

"Never miss deadlines."

"Bring order to chaos."

"Good sense of humor."

"Great attention to detail."