

# BEHAVIOURAL-BASED INTERVIEWING

## Sample Questions

Here are some typical competencies (HR-speak for “personal skills”) and some samples of behavioural-based questions that may be used to demonstrate them from Davila and Kursmark, *How to Choose the Right Person for the Right Job Every Time* (2005). No role will require every competency but by selecting the top six relevant competencies and preparing examples for each, you will be well-prepared for a behavioural-based interview.

### ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY

- Describe a situation where you had to adjust to a change over which you had no control.
- Sometimes jobs or projects change midstream. Tell me about a time when this happened to you and how you dealt with it.
- Describe the most demanding manager you’ve ever worked for. How did you adapt to his or her style?

### ANALYTICAL SKILLS

- Tell me about an analytical project you took on that was not in your job description. Why did you do it?
- How do you use numbers to measure organisational performance? Give me an example.
- What steps do you take to study a problem before making a decision? Use an example to illustrate this.

### ASSERTIVENESS

- When did your self-confidence allow you to take action others might have avoided? What was the result?
- Tell me when you felt like a “fish out of water”. What did you do to increase your comfort level?
- Describe a recent experience when you were faced with poor service or unacceptable quality. What did you do about it? What was the result?

### ATTENTION TO DETAIL

- We’ve all experienced something “slipping through the cracks”. Tell me about a time when this happened to you, what you did about it and what you did to prevent it from happening again.

- In many projects, it’s essential to keep track of details while managing the big picture. Tell me about a project where you did this. How did you make sure everything got done? How did you stay focussed on the larger goal?
- Give me an example of when you knew things were not going well with a particular project, process or activity. How did you know? What did you do to correct it?

### COLLABORATION

- What have you done when faced with problems you can’t solve within your team? Share an example.
- Tell me about a project you worked on that involved people from many different areas of the organisation. What did you do to make that project successful?
- Have you built a resource network outside your team? When has this paid off for you and your organisation?

### COMMITMENT

- Tell me about a time when you overcame very difficult challenges to get a job done.
- In the last year, what project or initiative did you abandon? Why? How could you have saved it?
- When have you been a “champion” for something? What did that entail?

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- Have you ever worked with someone you did not get along with? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
- Describe a recent situation in which you have had to work with someone who clearly did not like you. How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?
- Tell me about a time when you resolved a conflict with a customer/client.

### CONTROL

- What systems do you use to keep track of workplace tasks and important events? Give me an example of a time these systems failed and how you dealt with it.

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- How do you track your progress on a key project? Illustrate using a recent project.
- What ideas have you come up with that have given a better informed decision? Be specific.

### CREATIVITY/INNOVATION

- In your last position, name a good idea you had that was implemented. What impact did this have?
- What is your most creative completed work-related project?
- When have you come up with a cost-cutting idea?

### CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Crises usually require us to act quickly. In retrospect, how would you have handled a recent crisis differently, if you had been given more time to think?
- Describe a time when your work was very hectic. What did you do to keep it under control? How many extra hours did you work? For how long?

### CUSTOMER FOCUS

- When have you calmed an irate customer?
- What lessons have you learned to keep the customer satisfied? How did you learn them? Give an example of how you learned one of these lessons.
- When has your loyalty been divided between your customer and your organisation? What did you do?

### DEADLINE MANAGEMENT

- Tell me about a time you missed an important deadline. How could you have avoided this?
- Tell me about a time when you compromised quality or skimped on a process to meet a deadline. How did you choose what to compromise? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about your most deadline-driven job and give me some examples of deadlines you met and missed.

### DEALING WITH CHANGE

- Tell me about a time you were surprised by a work change. How did you deal with it?
- Walk me through the steps you took to acclimatise during the first week in your last job.
- Tell me about a time you did not deal well with a change. What prevented you? What could you have done differently? What was the outcome?

### DECISION-MAKING/DECISIVENESS/JUDGMENT

- What is the most difficult business decision you have had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?
- Can you give me an example of a decision you have had to make in a hurry?
- Tell me about the last time you made a decision when the instructions you were given were unclear, ambiguous or contradictory. How did you decide what to do?

### DELEGATION

- Tell me about an instance when you delegated work and it didn't get done. Why did it happen? What did you do about it?
- How do you match staff to assignments? Illustrate with some examples.
- Tell me about your biggest mistake in delegating. Why did you make that mistake?

### FACT-FINDING/RESEARCH

- Give an example that illustrates how you research to gather information to solve a problem.
- When you last received a new assignment, what was your procedure for gathering information? How did you know what to ask?
- Give me an example of when you made a poor decision because the facts you gathered were incorrect or incomplete.

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#### FOLLOW-UP

- Describe a situation where your follow-up was credited for capturing a business opportunity.
- We've all forgotten to follow up. Tell me one of those times. What did you learn from this that you used later? How did you use it?
- Tell me which follow-up tasks you have enjoyed and some you have found challenging.

#### GOAL ORIENTATION/GOAL SETTING

- Give an example of a goal you did not reach. How did you feel? What could you have done differently?
- Describe when you set your sights too high/ low.
- Tell me about an instance when you were unwilling to make the necessary sacrifice to achieve a goal.

#### IMPACT

- Describe a time you inspired a colleague.
- With what groups or individuals do you have the greatest impact? Please share some examples.
- Tell me when you were able to turn around the opinion of a group.

#### INDEPENDENCE

- Which boss has given you the most independence? How did you respond? What problems did you encounter?
- Tell me about a situation when you took matters into your own hands even though it should have been handled by your manager. What was the outcome?
- Can you share an example of a situation when you had to go against the consensus or policies to achieve a goal?

#### INITIATIVE

- Tell me about when you initiated an idea that had a major impact on your team, processes or organisation. How has this benefitted the team/organisation?

- Sometimes opportunities are disguised as problems. Can you tell me about a time you identified an opportunity? What did you do? What were the results?
- How did you get your last job?

#### INTEGRITY

- Think about a time your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- We all bend or stretch the truth to succeed in something important, make a big sale or avoid an unpleasant situation. Tell me when you have done this. How did you feel about it?
- Describe a company policy that you followed but did not agree with. Why did you feel like that?

#### INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Describe a situation when you wished you had acted differently towards someone. What did you do? What happened?
- How have you handled working with someone you didn't like?
- Tell me about a work situation where you had to adapt to working with a wide variety of people. What did you find difficult about that? What did you enjoy?

#### LEADERSHIP

- Describe a recent initiative that you led. What obstacles did you face in reaching your goals? How did you overcome them?
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to coordinate several people to achieve a goal. What prompted you to take the lead? How did you go? How did the group respond?
- Explain when you had to lead a technical team whose expertise exceeded yours. How did you deal with them?

#### LEARNING ATTITUDE

- Tell me about a recent situation you would describe as a learning experience. What did you learn? How have you applied it since then?

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- When have you had to learn new skills? How did you learn them? How long did it take? What problems did you encounter?
- What tricks or techniques have you learned to make a job easier? How did you learn them?

### LISTENING

- Give me an example of when you misinterpreted something. What did you do about it?
- Tell me about an assignment when you had to work purely from verbal instructions to get the job done. Did you have any problems with that?
- Tell me when your active listening skills have paid off.

### LOGIC

- When have you used instinct instead of logic to solve a problem? What was the result?
- Describe your thought process when analysing data to come to a decision. Share an example.
- Tell me when a logical solution you proposed was overridden by someone senior at your company. How did that make you feel? What was the outcome?

### NEGOTIATION

- Tell me when you had to work to rescue a stalled negotiation. What did you do? What was the result?
- What strengths do you bring to the negotiating table? Give me an example of how you used these strengths during a negotiation.
- Tell me about an unsuccessful negotiation. What was the fall out? What could you have done differently?

### PERSISTENCE

- Have you ever been accused of giving up too soon? What was the situation?
- Describe a situation where you reached a goal through determination. How long did you persist?
- What are some big obstacles that you've had to overcome? What steps did you take to achieve this?

### PERSUASIVENESS

- Outline a time when you were able to get others to follow your lead.
- What is the best idea you ever sold to your boss? What was your approach?
- Tell me when you were unable to sell your idea. Why did you fail? What could you have done differently?

### PLANNING AND ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS

- Give me a specific example of a project you planned. How did you organise and schedule tasks? Tell me about your action plan.
- Recall a time you were assigned a complex project. What steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently?
- Can you provide an example of an event/project you planned on very short notice?

### PRESENTATION

- When you are preparing and delivering a verbal presentation, how do you take your audience's needs into consideration? Give me an example.
- Have you ever been appointed spokesperson for a group? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about a time when you presented to a challenging audience. How did you deal with that audience? What was the outcome?

### PRIORITY SETTING

- Give me an example of when you had too many tasks to accomplish in the time allowed.
- Describe a situation where you had to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle the competing demands? What was the result?
- How do you make sure you are spending time on projects that are important but not necessarily urgent? Give me a recent example.

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#### PROBLEM-SOLVING

- Tell me about the most perplexing problem you have faced in the last year. How did you solve it?
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a big problem. Give me an example of when you have done this.
- Describe the ways you can deal with conflict. Give an example.

#### RAPPORT-BUILDING

- How do you “break the ice” with clients? Colleagues? Subordinates? Your manager? Share some examples.
- Describe a time when you were a new member of an existing group. How did you build rapport with your team members?
- Tell me about a work situation where you found it difficult to establish rapport with someone. What was the outcome?

#### RESILIENCE/DETERMINATION

- Can you give me an example of how you coped with a work-related disappointment?
- Describe a recent workplace situation that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about an idea you could not implement. What happened and how did that make you feel?

#### RESOURCEFULNESS

- Tell me about a problem you solved in an unusual way.
- Describe an instance where you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a problem.
- What is the most unusual task you’ve received at work in the last year? How did you respond?

#### RISK TAKING

- Describe when you made a decision without having all the necessary information. What was your decision-making process?

- Give me an example of a time you decided not to take action despite pressure to do so. How did you evaluate the situation? What was the result?
- Tell me about a risky move you made at work and why you made it.

#### SENSITIVITY TO OTHERS

- When you are dealing with individuals or groups, how do you know when you are pushing too hard? What do you do about it? Share an example.
- Tell me about a time a colleague was going through a rough time at work. How did you know? What actions did you take?
- Have you ever found it necessary to change your actions or behaviours to respond to others’ needs? What was the situation?

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT (FOR MANAGERS)

- When have you empowered your staff to make independent decisions?
- Describe a staff training program you implemented. How did you identify the need and choose the solution? What were the results?
- Tell me when you have documented a development need on a performance appraisal. What happened? How did you help?

#### STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Have you ever recognised a problem before your manager or others? Tell me about it.
- Describe when and how you addressed a competitive threat.
- Tell me about an idea or project you conceived. How did you know it was needed and would work? What was the outcome?

#### TEAM-BUILDING

- Describe when you developed a group into a strong working team.
- Tell me how you have contributed to team effectiveness when not a designated team leader.

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- Outline an instance when you were able to build team spirit in a time of low morale.

#### TEAMWORK

- Tell me about the most successful team you have ever been on. What made it work?
- Describe a time when team members had to compromise to get the job done. What was your role in that?
- Tell me about a time when a team member wasn't contributing. What was the situation and what steps did you take to resolve it?

#### TIME MANAGEMENT

- Share an example of when your time schedule was disrupted by unforeseen circumstances.
- When have you had to manage your schedule to allow time for important projects as well as the day-to-day?
- What prevents you from completing daily tasks? Walk me through a recent day on the job.

#### TOLERANCE FOR STRESS

- How do you deal with pressure? Give me an example of a high pressured-situation you handled recently.
- When have you felt frustrated and impatient dealing with a customer?
- Think of your most productive work experience. What stress levels were you under? Did that help or hinder your productivity?

#### VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Tell me when you had to be assertive to get across a different opinion.
- Describe a complex process, product, solution or rule you had to explain to someone. How did you know they understood?
- Give me an example of a time you had to communicate bad news to someone.

#### VERSATILITY/ADAPTABILITY

- Describe a time when you were working on several projects at once. How did you make the transition from one to the next over the course of a day?
- When has your manager asked you to take on a special project? What happened?
- Share a situation where you were required to change the way you work normally and found this change difficult.

#### WORK STANDARDS

- Tell me when you had to submit what you felt was not your best work. How did it make you feel?
- Give me two examples of things you've done in previous jobs that show your willingness to work hard.
- Have you disagreed with a manager's evaluation of your performance? How did you handle the situation?

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