

Behavioral Interviewing: Sample Questions

By Cecilia Gandolfo, Jeanne Miller, Sean O'Brien, Peggy Hale, Josh Dean, Laurie Ford, and Terry Brigrance

The Job-Driven Toolkits contain resources on promising and emerging job-driven practices in vocational rehabilitation (VR).



Behavioral interviewing is a popular mode of evaluating job candidates. This technique involves asking for details about past workplace situations, and how the person handled those situations. Because increasing numbers of employers are using behavioral interviewing to screen job candidates, understanding how to excel in this interview environment is a crucial job-hunting skill.

WHY LEARN THIS INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUE?

The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. In fact, behavioral interviewing is said to be 55% predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive.

Traditional interview questions ask general questions, such as, "Tell me about yourself." Behavioral interviewing is much more probing, and works very differently. In a traditional job interview, the candidate can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear. Even with situational questions such as "How would you handle XYZ scenario?" the candidate has minimal accountability. All the interviewer has to go on is the person's statement about what they'd do in a theoretical situation.

In a behavioral interview, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to character. When a candidate starts to tell a story about a past work issue, the behavioral interviewer will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behaviors the person showed. The interviewer might ask, "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." Dishonest

or vague responses will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

Employers use behavioral interviewing to determine the applicant's potential for success. The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position. For example, some of the characteristics that Accenture looks for include:

- » Critical thinking
- » Being a self-starter
- » Willingness to learn
- » Willingness to travel
- » Self-confidence
- » Teamwork
- » Professionalism

(Adapted from www.livecareer.com/quintessential/behavioral-interviewing)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO SCREEN EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

This resource lists personal characteristics ideal for professionals who deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) or employment provider services. Each characteristic is paired with behaviors that demonstrate the characteristic. Following the behaviors are sample behavioral interview questions to help evaluate an applicant for a VR business engagement or employment service provider job.

This is a long list of questions, and you will not have time to ask them all in an interview. Choosing several that are especially relevant for the open position can yield a strong interview framework. There is some duplication of questions as there is similarity in some of the personal characteristics, so it is important to identify which characteristics you most wish to target and select questions accordingly.

Empathetic nature

Demonstrate active listening.

Q: Please give an example of how you have used active listening in a counseling session or with businesses. What did you do? What were the results?

Use appropriate body language.

Q: Please tell me about a time when your body language didn't match your words when interacting with a business. Why did that happen, and what was the result? If you haven't had that experience with a business, describe a time in your personal or professional life when this happened.

Engage a job seeker or business.

Q: Describe a situation in which you demonstrated your empathy toward a business/employer (or client if no employer experience). What was the goal of your contact, and what impact did you have in that situation? What, if anything, would you change in the future?

Q: Describe a situation in which you effectively engaged with and responded to an employer. What was the outcome of the interaction? What did you learn from it?

Experience with people with disabilities

Show past experience with/exposure to people with significant disabilities successfully employed in community settings.

Q: Please provide an example of how you helped a person with significant disabilities become employed in a community setting. What was your role? How did it work out? What did you learn from the experience?

Q: (Alternative, for person with no employment experience): Please describe a situation where you saw or interacted with a person with significant disabilities working in a community setting. What were your observations? What did you learn from that experience? What, if anything, would you change about that situation?

Demonstrate ability to communicate and interact with people with significant disabilities.

Q: Please share a past situation in which you interacted/communicated with a person with a significant disability. What challenges did you face in that communication? What did you learn through that interaction?

Non-judgmental temperament

Consider the job seeker's expressed goals and desires.

Q: Please describe a situation when a client was eager to move forward with the VR process as quickly as possible but did not seem to have clear ideas or goals for a job or career.

Q: Please describe an experience when an individual with a disability expressed a career goal that you thought was unattainable for that individual. What happened, how did you respond, and what was the result for the job seeker?

Q: Give an example of an employer interaction in which the employer had specific questions or concerns about interacting with people with disabilities. How did you handle the interaction? What did you learn from the interaction?

Explore options even when choices conflict with your values.

Q: Please share a situation in which a client expressed goals that conflicted with either your values, or with what you perceived to be their best interest. What were the results of that conversation? What did you learn from that situation?

Q: Describe a situation in which a business person expressed concerns about people with significant disabilities being present in the workplace. How did you respond? What was the outcome of that conversation? What did you learn from that situation?

Help clients discuss goals with family/guardians.

Q: Describe a situation in which you had to help a client discuss career goals with the family. What did you do to facilitate that conversation? What were the results of that interaction? What if anything did you learn from that situation?

Identify job seeker skills, abilities, needs through document review and interactions with job seeker.

Q: Please describe your approach to learning about a job seeker to make or implement the best job/career plans for the individual. Is there a situation you're proud of, in which you explored with the job seeker to come up with the best plan? Or a situation where you tried, but were unable to make a good plan? In either case, what did you do? How did it work out?

Use labor market information to identify matches for job seekers.

Q: Please provide an example of how you have used labor market information tools to help job seekers. What tools did you use? What impact did the tools have? What did you learn from that experience?

Communicate and demonstrate with confidence the match of job seeker skills with employer needs.

Q: Could you give an example of a time you met with an employer who had hesitation about the knowledge and/or skills of a job seeker with a disability and the appropriateness of “fit” for their business? How did you handle it? What was the outcome? Any changes you’d make if you could have a “do over”?

Belief in community integrated employment for people with disabilities

Demonstrate belief that anyone can work and make contributions (value in society).

Q: Please explain the role you see people with disabilities playing in our society. How does employment fit in their lives? What role, if any, do VR and community rehabilitation providers play in the employment process?

Demonstrate belief in value exchange (value for value).

Q: Give me an example of what you’ve said in the past to an employer regarding hiring a person with a significant disability? What were your goals for that interaction? What were the results of the interaction? would you achieve those goals?

Believe in one’s own skills to teach tasks to job seekers and connect with employers.

Q: How confident are you about your skills in teaching tasks to workers with disabilities, on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not confident at all, and 10 being extremely confident)? Describe a situation in which you have taught a job task to a worker with disabilities. What did you do? What was the outcome?

Q: How confident are you about your ability to interact with employer in a manner that leads to positive outcomes for job seekers, on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not confident at all, and 10 being extremely confident)? Describe a situation in which you made a business contact that led to an employment outcome for a person with a disability. What did you do? What was the outcome? What, if anything, would you change?

Believe in having the job seeker as involved as possible in the job search process.

Q: Explain the role you see the job seeker playing in the job search process. Can you give an example in which you worked with a job seeker and talk about what roles you each played? What was the outcome of that situation? What, if anything, did you learn from that process?

Respectful interactions

Dress professionally to demonstrate respect for job seekers/businesses (match attire to work environment).

Q: Describe how you plan your attire for meeting with a business, by providing specific examples.

Demonstrate use of person-first language and respectful interactions.

Q: Please describe your understanding of person-first language. What is it and why is it used? How important do you feel it is for employment staff to use it?

Q: When interacting with a job seeker with disabilities and their family or potential employers, what specific things do you do to ensure that you’re respectful to the person with a disability?

Demonstrate eye-contact (observe in interview).

Allow people to complete their thoughts without interruptions (observe in interview).

Keep technology from pulling attention away from the conversation.

Q: In an era of computerized case management systems, smartphones, etc., what strategies do you employ as you interact with job seekers to make sure that you stay focused on each other, rather than on technology? Can you give an example of how and when you handle case documentation in electronic case management systems regarding your client interactions?

Be on time/slightly early. End at agreed upon time to demonstrate the value of the job seeker/employer time. Be responsive to requests for help, calls, etc. (performance issue).

Q: Please describe a situation when an employer reached out to you for help with an “urgent situation”. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome? What, if anything, did you learn from the situation?

Meet job seekers on their terms and turf.

Q: Can you describe how you work with job seekers to truly understand who they are and what they want to help them reach their goals? Any specific approaches you try? Any examples you are particularly proud of? Any lessons learned along the way?

Meet employers on their terms and turf.

Q: Please describe your approach to getting to know an employer. How do you initiate the connection, and then explore the person/business? Any lessons learned along the way that influenced how you interact?

Demonstrate support without being in control of job seeker.

Q: Please give an example of supporting a job seeker in a way that allowed the job seeker to be in control of the situation. What was the situation, and what did you do? What was the outcome? What, if anything, would you change about the situation?

Resilience

Can learn from mistakes.

Q: We all make mistakes, so would you give an example of a time you made a professional mistake? What were the circumstances that led to your error? What impact did it have? What did you learn from it?

Keep trying different approaches.

Q: Please share a situation where you had to try many different approaches before arriving at a solution. What was the situation? How did you come to the solution? What was the outcome?

Generate plans, takes actions, and evaluates outcomes.

Q: Please describe a work project that required planning. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?

Accept rejection/criticism.

Q: Please describe a situation in which your pursuit of an employer for a placement failed, despite your feeling that it would be a good match. What happened? How did you deal with it? How did things end?

Q: Please describe a situation when a client or family of a client criticized how you handled working together. What happened? What was your reaction? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

Enjoy the ride, laugh, and not take self too seriously.

Q: Please describe a situation when a client or family of a client criticized how you handled working with him/her/them. What happened? What was your reaction? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

Engaging personality

Demonstrate ability to relate to a wide range of personality types. Use skill sets to interact with others.

Q: How would you describe your interactive style as it relates to meeting a wide range of personalities? Are there types of people you do better and worse with? What have you learned about or changed in your style when working with different types of people?

Demonstrate body language & eye contact to convey interest in conversations (observe in interview).

Make suggestions rather than demands.

Q: What is your approach to working with a business to make a job match, or carve out a job for a client? How do you handle that interaction? How do you gauge the interactions to figure out how aggressive to be? Can you talk about a situation where you it worked well? What about an example of when it did not work out well? What have you learned from your experiences? How have you changed your approach?

Flexibility

Willing to make course corrections and adapt.

Q: Please describe a situation in which you had a plan of action with a client, but the client changed his/her mind and wanted to completely change career directions. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

Willing to meet at times when the job seeker/ employer are available.

Q: Can you give an when an employer asked to meet at an inconvenient time for you? What did you do? What was the outcome? What did you learn from that situation?

Willing to accept opinions other than one's own.

Q: Please share an example of a time when a client or client's family wanted something contrary to what you were thinking for the client. What was the situation? How did you handle it? What was the outcome? What did you learn from the situation?

Willing to try new approaches.

Q: Please share an example of a time when you turned to colleagues or others for advice on how to handle a situation that was not working out. What was the problem? What did you do as a result of the advice? What was the outcome? What did you learn from the situation?

Intentionality of actions

Think before speaking or acting.

Q: Can you give an example of a time you acted too fast, for example, speaking in haste or hitting "send" for an email in haste? What was the situation? What impact did your haste have? What did you learn from that situation?

Plan interaction with business before initiating contact.

Q: Please describe your process for planning to interact with a business contact. Can you give an example of how this has worked? What did you do and what was the outcome?

Maintain focus on big-picture goal, and redirect as needed.

Q: How do you manage your work with individuals when they get distracted or go in too many directions with their thoughts and actions? Talk about a situation when you had this happen. What did you do? What was the outcome?

Have goals for day, week, month, etc.

Q: Please describe how you handle your time management as a planning tool. What do you do? How well does it work for you? Have you changed your approach?

Understand the difference between just a job and the right job.

Q: Please describe a time when a job became available for a job seeker, but you did not think it was the right job given the person's goals/desires. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?



www.exploreVR.org

These toolkits were developed by the Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC), funded by Rehabilitation Services Administration Grant #H264A140002. They are a publication of ExploreVR, the data hub for a group of vocational rehabilitation research (VR) projects at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

