BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Identify the skills needed for your vacant job, then develop questions that delve into the candidate’s experience and provide insight into past performance and capabilities.

Skills / Competencies

1. **Coping** Able to maintain a mature, problem-solving attitude while dealing with interpersonal conflict, hazardous conditions, personal rejection, hostility, or time demands.
   - Tell me about a time when you had to cope with strict deadlines or time demands. Give me an example.
   - It is not unusual to be in a setting at work that will be physically demanding or hazardous. Tell me about a time when you were able to do a job in spite of difficult conditions.
   - Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work. Tell me what happened, who was involved, and what you did in terms of problem solving.
   - Give me an example of a time when another person really tried your patience. Specifically, talk about a time when you were able to speak respectfully even when you were angry or frustrated.

2. **Tolerance of Ambiguity** Able to withhold actions or speech in the absence of important information: deal with unresolved situations, frequent change, delays, or unexpected events.
   - Describe a time in your life when you were proud of your ability to postpone your comments until you had all the facts necessary for a good response to a situation.
   - What has been your experience in working with conflicting, delayed, or ambiguous information? What did you do to make the most of the situation?
   - People differ in their preference for jobs which have well laid-out tasks and responsibilities or ones in which work changes frequently. Tell me about a time when you were successful in dealing with an unstructured work environment.
   - When have you been most proud of your ability to wait for important information before taking action in solving a problem? How did the waiting affect you?

3. **Decisiveness** Able to make decisions quickly on available information and take action; make commitments and not change decisions when challenged; deal with emergencies as necessary.
   - Many situations at work will require fast thinking and speed in making decisions. Give me an example of a situation in which you were especially skillful in making a decision quickly.
   - Many times it is important to be firm about a decision you are making, particularly when others don’t like it. Give me an example of a time when you stuck by a decision even though it was under attack by others.
   - Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take speedy action.
   - Describe a time when you were under pressure to make an immediate decision (perhaps without the aid of a supervisor or a manager). Did you take action immediately or were you more deliberate and thoughtful?
4. **Spoken Communications** Able to clearly present information through the spoken word; influence or persuade others through oral presentation in positive or negative circumstances; listen well.

- Tell me about a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you—maybe a time when other people missed the key idea in what was being expressed.
- Careful listening and effective communications go together. Tell me about a specific time when your skill in listening helped you communicate better.
- Tell me about a time when your language and speaking skills really worked for you on the job. Feel free to use either a supervisory or non-supervisory example.
- What have been your experiences in making presentations or speeches to small or large groups? What has been your most successful experience in public speaking?

5. **Assertiveness** Able to maturely express one’s feelings and opinions that differ from those of others; accurately communicate to others regardless of their status or position.

- It is pretty realistic to say that no job is completely free of conflict. Tell me about a time when you were able to express your opinions maturely in spite of disagreements or objections.
- Tell me about a time when your job required you to say, maturely, how you really felt about a situation. What did you say and how did you say it?
- Sometimes it is important to disagree with others, particularly your boss or team members, in order to keep a mistake from being made. Tell me about a time when you were willing to disagree with another person in order to build a positive outcome.
- Some of the best business ideas come from an individual’s ability to challenge others’ ways of thinking in a mature way. Tell me about a time when you were successful in challenging others’ ideas. What does this say about your ability to be assertive?

6. **Energizing** Able to create positive energy (motivation) in both individuals and groups.

- What kinds of experiences have you had in using prizes, contests, or financial rewards to motivate others? How do you evaluate the success of these techniques in general? How successful were you in a specific case?
- Tell me about a time in which you used competition successfully as a means of encouraging others to try hard.
- Tell me about a specific time when your ability to reward and encourage others created positive motivation.
- At work it is sometimes desirable to use recognition to build motivation in others. Describe a time in which you were able to use recognition to create positive energy in another person.
7. **Policy and Procedures** Able to relate to routine operations in a manner that is consistent with existing solutions to problems; conform to established policies and procedures, log work activities.

- When have you found it necessary to use detailed checklists or procedures to reduce potential for error on the job? Be specific.
- Select a job you have had and describe the paperwork you were required to complete. What specific things did you do to ensure your accuracy?
- What types of experience have you had in managing situations that involve human health/human welfare or severe financial outcomes? Detail, as much as possible, the way in which you used policy and procedures to ensure your job effectiveness.
- We all recognize that regulations may vary in terms of their meaningfulness. Select a strict and meaningful regulation you had to conform to in your last position. Tell me about the regulation and how you were able to work under it.

8. **Alertness** Able to be attentive to all aspects of the environment while working; to monitor environment during routine activity.

- Tell me about your experience in dealing with routine work. What kinds of problems did you have to overcome in order to concentrate on the details of the job?
- Select an experience from your past which illustrates your ability to be watchful and alert when monitoring displays, instruments, or processes. Tell me, in detail, what happened.
- Identify a time when you initiated training or greater awareness around safety risks for the work area and coworkers.
- Give me an example that shows the value you give to producing high quality work and how you were able to correct harmful errors.

9. **Analytical Problem Solving** Able to use a systematic approach in solving problems through analysis of problem and evaluation of alternate solutions; use logic, mathematics, or other problem solving tools in data analysis or in generating solutions.

- To what extent has your past work required you to be skilled in the analysis of technical reports or information? Pick any specific experience which would highlight your skills in this area and describe it in detail.
- Give me an example of any time when you used tools such as survey data, library research, or statistics as important contributors to the definition of a specific problem.
- What was your greatest success in using the principles of logic to solve technical problems at work? Be specific.
- Thinking back over the last five years of your work, describe a situation in which you had to use mathematics to solve a complex problem. Take your time, remember a good example, and tell me all about it in detail.
10. **Goal Setting** Able to define realistic, specific goals and objectives; to prioritize objectives.
   - Give me an example of a time when you used a systematic process to define your objectives. What type of system did you use? What payoff did you get from using the process?
   - What have been your experiences in defining long-range goals? Tell me what specific goal was set, how it was set, and how successful you were in its achievement.
   - Tell me about the system that you used for goal setting. To what extent does it involve using written objectives, paperwork or forms? Describe a specific instance in which you defined your goals and objectives in writing.
   - Tell me what you do in order to ensure that you have enough time set aside for goal setting then review for me a specific time in which you have initiated your own goal setting in the last few years. What happened?

11. **Written Communication** Able to write clearly and effectively present ideas and to document activities; to read and interpret written information.
   - Describe your experiences in editing manuscripts, articles, documents, or any other form of written communication. Be specific.
   - In some positions it is necessary to be a thorough, meticulous reader and in other situations it is important for one to be able to scan through large amounts of information quickly. Describe your most significant scanning experience.
   - In some jobs it is necessary to document work thoroughly, in writing. For example, documentation might be necessary to prove you did your job correctly or to train another person to do it. Give me an example of your experiences in this area.
   - This job will require you to spend a large amount of time writing. Tell me about your writing experiences that you think will contribute to your ability to do this job well.

12. **Commitment to Task** Able to start and persist with specific courses of action while exhibiting high motivation and a sense of urgency; willing to commit to long hours of work and make personal sacrifice in order to reach goals.
   - Tell me about a time at work when someone commented on your high level of task orientation.
   - Some individuals have a strong sense of urgency about getting results; others are more relaxed and less driven in their approach to work. Give me an example of a time when you had a sense of urgency about getting results.
   - We both recognize that being successful takes more than luck. Hard work is necessary in order to achieve. Tell me about a time when you had to work very hard to reach your goals and be specific about what you achieved.
   - Give me an example of any specific time in which you found it necessary to give long hours to the job. For example, tell me about the period when it was necessary to take work home, work on weekends, or maintain unusually long hours. Be specific.
13. **Interaction** Able to communicate with others in a warm and helpful manner while simultaneously building credibility and rapport.
   - Sometimes showing concern for another person is a foundation for building a good long-term relationship. Tell me about a time when your concern for a particular individual was reflected in an interview, coaching, or counseling.
   - It is all too easy to ignore the feelings of others because of a preoccupation with our own needs. Tell me about a time when you made a special effort to reach another person in a way which showed your respect for the other’s feelings.
   - The word “communications” means different things to different persons at different times. Tell me what this word means to you by giving me an example of a time when you were able to be warm and amiable as a communicator.
   - Being skillful in dealing with other people on the job is an important factor in being productive. Describe a time when you were successful in dealing with another because you built a trusting and harmonious relationship.

14. **Perceptivity** Able to interpret verbal and non-verbal behavior; to develop accurate perception and understanding of others’ feelings, needs, values, and opinions; to be sensitive to and aware of personality differences and conflicts.
   - Tell me about a situation in which you were particularly skillful in detecting clues about another person’s thoughts or feelings. How did you develop an accurate perception of the person?
   - Tell me about a time which shows your skill in recognizing hidden interests or personality conflicts.
   - It is sometimes very difficult to perceive the needs, values, or opinions of others. Tell me about a time when you were able to think like another person in order to discover his or her unique perspective.
   - Understanding people can be an important skill. At work, when has your analysis of another’s motives and feelings paid off for you?

15. **Organization and Planning** Able to organize or schedule people or tasks; to develop realistic action plans while being sensitive to time constraints and resource availability.
   - Organization and scheduling of people and tasks is a necessary function in creating a productive working environment. Review your experiences in this area and detail a single case that illustrates your organization and scheduling ability.
   - Pick any event at work which gives a good example of your skill in analyzing data to make a forecast or plans. To what extent did you use statistical procedures as opposed to an intuitive approach?
   - Time management has become a necessary factor in personal productivity. Give me an example of any time management skill you have learned and applied at work. What resulted from use of the skill?
   - Give me an example of a time in which you were effective in doing away with the “constant emergencies” and “surprises” in your work climate. How did your planning help you deal with the unexpected?
16. **Creativity** Able to develop unique and novel solutions to problems; use intuition and a new way of thinking to give birth to new ideas; to present information in an attention-getting and interesting manner.

- New ideas may come from intuition; however, many ideas come from hard work and dedication. Tell me of an idea you originated through combined hard work and intuition.
- Often individuals who are creative in one mode seem to have creative skills in other areas. How do you rate yourself in terms of creativity in the fields of art, writing, and music? Tell me, by example, how you used these skills in your job.
- Give me an example of a time when you were inventive and explored new ways of thinking about a complex work issue. What result did your creativity have on work?
- Just about anybody can give a routine, standard answer to common problems; however, the payoff is often in the development of unique solutions to common problems. Give me an example of one of your unique and novel problem solutions.

17. **Versatility** Able to modify one’s own behavioral style to respond to the needs of others while maintaining one’s own objectives and sense of dignity.

- Tell me about a time when you were able to make someone feel comfortable when dealing with an emotionally charged situation and reach a common understanding.
- Describe your experience working in a diverse work group and what contribution you were able to make toward mutually beneficial goals.
- Describe a time when you were able to adapt to a person from a background or culture that was different from yours.
- Sooner or later we all have to deal with arrogant, dogmatic people. Tell me about a time when you were able to be flexible with this type of person.

18. **Reading the System** Able to recognize and use information about organizational climate and key individuals to accomplish legitimate organizational goals; be aware of the importance of timing, politics, and group processes in managing change.

- At times it is very important to understand how communication channels, interpersonal networks, and politics influence decisions at work. Describe a time when your understanding of political dynamics at work was put to good use.
- The term “shrewd” suggests an ability to understand what really needs to be done to reach organizational objectives. Tell me how you “read the system” shrewdly to reach a goal.
- Different people have different motivators. When have you been successful in discovering a key person’s motivation and using that knowledge to bring about an important change? Be specific.
- Many times, getting results requires a full understanding of the organizational climate or culture. Tell me about a time when your astuteness or practical sense in an organization helped you to get results.
19. **Team Building** Able to work with people in such a manner as to build high morale and gain commitments to goals and objectives.
   - It has been said that one of the best ways to manage people is to teach them how to manage themselves. Tell me about a time when you contributed to a working group’s ability to be self-directed by building group standards for performance.
   - One way to build a teamwork attitude is to explain to individuals how their personal goals overlap with team goals. Give me an example of any time in which you were able to build an overlap of individual and team goals.
   - The term “participative management” has been used for years to describe a technique of building a team spirit by collecting suggestions from others. Describe a time when you used suggestions to build team commitment.
   - We cannot do everything ourselves. Give me an example of a time when you dealt with this reality by creating a special team effort at work. Highlight the special aspects of the situation which best demonstrate your skill in this area.

20. **Decision Making and Problem Solving** Able to take action in solving problems while exhibiting judgment and a realistic understanding of issues; able to use reason, even when dealing with emotional topics.
   - Solving problems requires more than good plans; it means taking action. Give me an example of a time when you were able to take meaningful action in solving a practical problem.
   - When we get emotionally involved in a problem situation, it is often very difficult to be objective. Tell me about a time when you were able to maintain objectivity for the best outcome in spite of personal feelings or attachments.
   - Good problem solving often includes a careful review of the facts and weighing of options before making a decision. Give me an example of how you reached a practical business decision by an organized review of the facts and weighing of options.
   - Tell me about a time when your understanding of issues associated with a problem provided you with a foundation for generating a good solution.

21. **Leadership** Able to influence the actions and opinions of others in a desired direction; to exhibit judgment in leading others to worthwhile objectives.
   - Give me an example of a time when you used facts and reason to persuade another person to take action. Be specific.
   - Organizations are built on the principle of delegation. Give me an example of the greatest success you ever had in the use of delegation.
   - Individuals vary in their abilities to use power or persuasion to influence others. Give me an example of a time when you used either power or persuasion to guide another person to a worthwhile objective. Be specific.
   - Name an accomplishment in your career of which you are most proud. What was the impact to the organization and people?