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Behavioral Event Interviewing

► *What is it?*

Behavioral Event Interviewing (BEI) is a technique that asks the candidate to describe a situation or an experience they had in a previous job. Responses may not be as polished as the traditional type of question because they cannot be rehearsed ahead of time. Nonetheless, the interviewer gathers valuable information from experiential responses because past performance predicts future performance.

► *Why is it useful?*

It's important to assess whether the candidate demonstrates traits that fit your workplace culture. BEI questions solicit real-life experiential responses that provide a way to evaluate skills, knowledge, and behaviors versus philosophical views. The candidate's responses are a true indication of how the candidate will behave and perform in future work-related situations.

Behavioral competency assessment is an integral part of the performance management process in high performing organizations.

► *Who should use it?*

Behavioral Event Interviewing is helpful for anyone conducting an interview, particularly the hiring manager. The technique works well in a multiple- interviewer scenario. Various questions can be assigned to members of the interview team, or the hiring manager can seek multiple perspectives if the same questions are asked by more than one member.

► *When is it used?*

Behavioral Event Interviewing can be used to evaluate candidates for any open position. A critical success factor in selecting the best candidate is seeking adequate information to assess whether the candidate's skills, education, experience, and *behavioral traits* are a good match with the key job requirements *and* your organization's culture.



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► How is it done?

A **BEI template** includes standard interview questions. It is helpful to customize questions to align the requirements of the open position and the organization's culture. Customization should be done prior to the interview. **Follow-up probes** are used to further explore the candidate's response to a particular question.

To avoid redundancy and when time is limited, it's beneficial to assign areas of focus and specific questions to each member of the interview team.

- 1. The Warm-up** of an interview begins with putting the candidate at ease and making him/her feel welcomed. In your own words, thank him/her for coming to the interview and express appreciation for their interest in your organization. Your tone of voice, eye contact, facial expression, body language and level of enthusiasm all affect your ability to build rapport and impact the candidate's willingness to be open throughout the interview. Next, explain that you'll be asking about specific experiences they've had and how they reacted in certain situations. Let them know they could not have prepared for these questions, so not to be concerned if they take a minute to gather their thoughts before responding, nor should they be concerned if their answers don't sound as polished as they might in a traditional interview. Ask them to explain the situation, who was involved, their role, actions taken, and results/outcomes. Let the candidate know you will be taking notes during the interview, and you may briefly interrupt them from time to time to further explore or gain clarity. Ensure the candidate knows that there will be time for him/her to ask questions toward the end of interview.
- 2. Task Preference – Compatibility Match** questions help evaluate whether a candidate's task preferences are compatible with the pace, people, task, and problem-solving requirements of the open position. Gaining awareness of a candidate's likes and dislikes also provides insight to their level of engagement and future performance. *"Everyone has some tasks/projects they feel more comfortable with than others. Think back over the last two years or so, and tell me about a task or project you worked on that you really enjoyed – one where you really came alive."*



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Asking a veteran candidate what they liked best about serving in the military will give insight into whether a radical change in his/her life will be a relief, a shock or something altogether different. Use **follow-up probes** to further manage the conversation: *"Who were they working with? What was the pace of the work?"*

"Now tell me about a task/project you did not enjoy – one that you hope you won't have to repeat." Use similar **follow-up probes** as before to manage the conversation.

- 3. Function-Specific Competency** questions help focus and understand whether a candidate's current knowledge, skills and education meet the technical requirements of the open position. **Follow-up probes** could focus on their strengths and weaknesses, how they'll apply their expertise or how they would prefer to get acclimated if they joined your organization. The hiring manager should identify and share the required technical competencies of the open position with the interview team prior to the interview so they can ask appropriate questions. Examples of selling competencies follow. Entrepreneurial Orientation: *"How do you inspire trust and loyalty among the people you work with? Give me an example of a time in the past two or three years when you inspired trust and loyalty with an internal or external colleague or customer."* Follow-up probes could focus on what s/he specifically feels were the key attributes in gaining trust/loyalty with this particular customer, and then ask what portion of the scenario the candidate uses with all customers. Emotional Mastery and Discipline: *"Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating colleague or customer you've ever dealt with."* Follow-up probes could include asking their role in the scenario, describing the person in more detail, how they personally handled the situation, and/or how the relationship evolved over in the long run. Product/Service Knowledge: *"Give me a brief overview of the main product(s) or service(s) you currently work with. How did you learn the product/ service line?"* Follow-up probes could focus on how the products/services work, their strengths and weaknesses. Also explore how they would get acclimated to your organization's products/services.



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4. **Organizational Competencies** are behaviors or traits required for successful performance for all employees. Also explore how they would prefer to get acclimated to your organization's products/services. **Follow-up probes** could explore their reaction to a change, key factors in overcoming an organizational obstacle, their role on a team project and its associated successes and failures.

Business Innovation: *"Tell me about a time at work or in the military where you really stepped up to a challenge, offered an innovative solution or took a high risk."*

Follow-up Probes could include asking the candidate's reaction to taking that risk; or looking back, what they have done anything differently?

Adaptability: *"Tell me about a project or task where you found yourself having to react to a major unexpected obstacle or change? What was the situation and what did you do?"*

Follow-up Probes could include asking what the key factors were in overcoming the obstacle, how they accepted and managed the change, or how they reacted when it prevented them from achieving an objective.

Teamwork: *"Tell me about a time when you worked on a project where very diverse people were brought together to achieve a goal."*

Follow-up probes could explore the role they played on the team, the success and failures of the project, and/or the most difficult team member and how they dealt with him/her.

5. **Exit Dialogs** provide time to answer the candidate's questions, to share what your organization has to offer, and to relay next steps. Be prepared to answer questions about career paths and benefits (medical, retirement, education, vacation, absenteeism, etc.). Commit to getting the answers to the candidate as quickly as possible if you're not knowledgeable of all the specifics.



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Inform the candidate of the next step in the hiring process, and share future expectations (e.g., a decision will be communicated via e-mail within the next two weeks). Thank the candidate for their interest and time spent exploring the open position.

6. Post Interview reflections provide opportunity to capture findings, evaluate and make conclusions of each candidate.

- Immediately following the interview, review your notes for each question, evaluate the candidate's response. On the **Candidate Assessment Summary**, enter a rating, their key strengths and weaknesses for each question.
- The hiring manager should collect candidate evaluations from the interview team so he/she can analyze the results and develop a comprehensive ranking. Doing so ensures the hiring manager is aware of all information attained during the team interview process.

► *Tips and Success Factors*

- Determine who will be part of the interview team; assign specific areas of focus and questions to members.
- While questions should be modified to fit the open position, *it is important that every candidate interviewed be asked the same set of questions.*
- Focus the candidate on their actions – “I” vs. “we” – so that you gain perspective on what he/she has personally accomplished.
- To ensure your assessment is based on a diverse set of information, try to limit discussion to no more than five minutes for each question.
- Be watchful of the “halo effect,” where a candidate seems to have all the right answers or look. Use behavioral questions to determine whether the candidate's responses are consistent with past performance.



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- Reserve judgment! Avoid drawing conclusions from a single statement. Deliberately look for evidence contrary to your initial view. Use follow-up probes to gain clarity and encourage the candidate to explain his or her statement.
- Be aware of your own subtle biases and behaviors when assessing responses, particularly from candidates who have different cultural backgrounds than your own. Eye contact, voice tone and behavioral tendencies can convey varying messages from one culture to another.
- If interviewers present conflicting perspectives, schedule an information- sharing and consensus-building meeting with the interview team before finalizing the hiring decision.
- Be open to differences when selecting the best candidate. Although it's important for employees to share common qualifications and experiences, a diverse workforce can offer unique ideas and solutions which open up avenues of new business.
- When using referral information from others, ensure it's coming from an accurate and credible source. Avoid hearsay or office gossip.
- Interviews are a time for candidates to sell themselves, and also provide an opportunity to market the advantages of being employed by your organization (e.g., benefits, career paths, development opportunities).

► *Reference Material*

- *"Interview Tips – Behavior Based Interviewing,"* Bruce Dwyer, <http://jobsearchtech.about.com/od/gettingthejob/a/Interviewing.htm>
- *"High Impact Interview Questions: 701 Behavior-Based Questions to Find the Right Person for Every Job,"* V.A. Hoevemeyer, AMACOM, 2006

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