Behavior Based Interview Questions

Increasing numbers of employers are utilizing a behavioral interviewing process. It is a procedure based on the theory that the most accurate predictor of future performance with their organization is one’s past performance.

It requires that all answers be as specific and detailed as possible. Candidates who offer examples related to particular situations will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms. New graduates with little paid work experience in the field can still shine in this format by using related examples from school, volunteer, internship, sports activities and similar experiences.

Questions often begin with...

Describe a situation in which you...
Tell me about a time when you...
Please discuss...and give a specific example...

Since you cannot anticipate the exact wording of behavioral questions, what is the best way to prepare for such an interview? Review the point made in the section “Prior to the Interview” found on the Interviewing Tips for the Wise Job Searcher handout.

As you consider the job description and what you know about the organization, visualize the broad concerns. You will be expected to discuss in behavioral terms such as teamwork, technical and professional skills, initiative, and skills of analysis, communication, and flexibility as they apply to the job description and the organization. Develop a small arsenal of stories that use examples and can be adapted to a variety of behavioral questions.

When asked a behavioral question, you should briefly describe the situation, what specific action you took that affected the situation, and the positive result. This three step process is called a SAR statement:

Step 1 – Situation (or task, problem, etc)
Step 2 – Action taken
Step 3 – Result (or outcome)

Sample Question: Describe a situation where you exerted leadership in a group process.

Sample Answer:
Situation (S):
The deadline for a group project for our economics class was fast approaching and we seemed confused and unmotivated.

Action (A):
I met with the professor to clarify her expectations for the project. I then called a meeting of our group and suggested a process and a time frame to accomplish the project. Individual tasks and roles were determined by interest.

Result (R):
The class presentation of our project was given a grade of A by the professor and peer evaluations rated it highly. In addition, the group had a feeling of accomplishment where once there was confusion and indecision.