

VIDAL GRAUPERA



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW BLUEPRINT

A Proven Guide to Ace
Your Next Job Interview

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Chapter 6

Behavioral Interview Techniques



“The only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it is possible.” - Charles Kingsleigh, *Alice in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll)

Understanding the "Why" Behind the Questions

Whenever you're asked a question during an interview, take a moment to reflect: "Why are they asking this question?" What is your interviewer trying to understand through this question? Often, the intent behind the question extends beyond its apparent meaning. If the interviewers are seasoned, each question is posed with a specific objective, seeking a particular "signal" about your suitability for the role. It could hurt your chances if they don't get the intended signal, either because you didn't respond convincingly or address the "why" behind the question.

Sometimes, interviewers might throw tough questions your way to understand your thought processes. In such cases, the exact answer is less important than your approach and thoughtfulness in responding. For example, they might assess whether you consider your team's impact, whether your decisions are data-driven or guided by intuition, and so forth.

Don't hesitate to seek clarity if the question's intent is unclear to you. For example, if you're asked, "Can you describe a situation where you had to solve a challenging problem?" If this question seems ambiguous or open-ended, you could seek clarification by asking, "Are you interested in a technical problem I faced and how I overcame it, or are you referring to an interpersonal issue that required problem-solving skills?"

In this scenario, the interviewer might be trying to gauge your problem-solving capabilities and adaptability. For example, can you think on your feet in a technical crisis, or do you possess the emotional intelligence needed to navigate complicated interpersonal dynamics? These facets are significant contributors to your overall efficacy in any role. By asking for clarification, you can tailor your response to better reflect the skills the interviewer is trying to assess.

By understanding the purpose behind the questions, you can tailor your responses to align with what the interviewer is genuinely seeking, thereby increasing your chances of success.

Mirroring the Interviewer: A Subtle Strategy for Success

Mirroring, when done subtly and respectfully, can be a powerful tool in an interview situation. It's a social phenomenon where we subconsciously adjust our body language, vocal qualities, or attitudes to match those of the person we're interacting with, creating a sense of rapport and mutual understanding.

In the context of an interview, mirroring can be particularly beneficial in establishing a connection with the interviewer. By subtly echoing their language, tone, pace, or body language, you're showing that you're in sync with them, that you understand their communication style, and that you're capable of fitting in with the company culture. For example, if your interviewer speaks in a calm and measured manner, respond similarly. If they use specific jargon or terminology, incorporate it into your responses when appropriate.

But remember, the key to successful mirroring is subtlety and authenticity. You're not imitating the interviewer, rather aligning your communication style with theirs. Overdoing it can appear insincere and might work against you. So, while mirroring can help you build a connection and make your responses more likely to resonate, it should always be balanced with maintaining your unique personality and authenticity.

Ultimately, mirroring the interviewer can contribute to a more effective communication and a positive interview experience. It can make the conversation flow more naturally, reduce misunderstandings, and create a sense of comfort and rapport. But it should be just one tool in your interview toolbox, alongside preparation, practice, and, of course, the value that you bring as a potential candidate.

Use Keywords and Phrases from the Job Description

Incorporating keywords and phrases from the job description also can showcase your interest in the job. By aligning your answers with the job requirements, you can strengthen your case for being the right candidate for the position.

Use Descriptive Language and be Specific

Using descriptive language and being specific when answering behavioral interview questions can help create a vivid picture of your experiences and accomplishments. Instead of saying, “I worked on a project,” use specific details to make your answer more engaging and memorable. For example: “I spearheaded a team of five individuals to complete a project that resulted in a 20% increase in customer satisfaction ratings.” This response provides specific information that leaves a lasting impression on the interviewer and demonstrates your communication ability.

Explain Your Thought Process and Decision Making

Explaining your thought process and decision-making is just as important as showcasing your skills when answering behavioral interview questions. It is essential to show how your skills were applied in a specific situation. Explain how you came to your solution by detailing challenges and considerations. Outlining the steps taken to arrive at your decision will offer insight into your thought process and problem-solving skills. Make sure you come across as confident in your abilities and are clear in how you make your best decisions.

Show Enthusiasm and Passion for the Job: But Keep it Balanced

Exuding enthusiasm and passion for the job and the company can significantly influence the impression you leave on the interviewer. Companies seek individuals who are genuinely invested in the role and

display a keen interest in being part of the organization. Such enthusiasm sets you apart, signaling you are eager to embrace new challenges and contribute positively to the team.

However, it's crucial to strike a balance. Excessive enthusiasm can come off as insincere or desperate, whereas showing too little can leave interviewers questioning your interest in the role. Strive for authenticity; let your natural excitement about the role and company come through without overdoing it.

One effective way to exhibit enthusiasm is by interacting actively during the interview, responding to questions with energy, and showcasing a positive attitude. Subtly highlighting how the role aligns with your career goals, passion, or personal interests can also help communicate your genuine interest.

Be mindful that your interest level may also influence the company's pursuit of you post-interview. Similar to dating, there's a need to show mutual interest while maintaining a sense of detachment. Too much pursuit can be off-putting, while too little may lead them to believe you're not genuinely interested.

Remember, passion goes beyond mere research. It includes understanding the role, the industry, and the specific ways you can contribute to the company's success. By demonstrating this balance, you'll leave a positive and lasting impression on the interviewer, enhancing your chances of landing the job.

Demonstrate Your Interest and Research: Be Mindful of Your Questions

A vital part of a successful interview is showcasing your interest in and knowledge of the organization. This is best achieved by doing your research in advance and entering the interview armed with meaningful, unique questions about the company's goals, culture, and values.

Be aware that interviewers often record or write down the questions you ask. These questions are not only reflective of your interest in the company, but they also offer an insight into your critical thinking skills and understanding of the role and the organization. For this reason, it's essential to avoid asking the same generic questions to every interviewer. Instead, tailor your queries based on the specific role of the person interviewing you. For instance, you might ask a potential manager about their leadership style or a potential teammate about the team's dynamics.

Your questions should reveal that you've invested time and effort to understand the company and that you are genuinely interested in the role. Also, be ready to articulate why you want to work for the organization and how your values align with theirs. Employers are always looking for candidates who resonate with their mission and vision and who demonstrate a strong motivation to contribute to their goals. So, make your questions count!

Use Examples From Different Aspects of your Life — Mindfully

Drawing from a diverse array of experiences in your life can illuminate your versatility and well-roundedness to interviewers during behavioral interviews. While your professional background holds paramount importance, employers are increasingly seeking out candidates with multi-faceted skill sets. This means that instances from your personal life, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, or even hobbies can all serve as potential reservoirs for behavioral examples.

However, a word of caution: while presenting these experiences, be mindful to avoid divulging information that might inadvertently lead to unconscious bias or discrimination. It is important to refrain from discussing details that might reveal sensitive information about your age, religion, political views, or other protected characteristics, unless they are directly relevant and you're comfortable sharing them. Always consider the potential implications of the information you share in an interview.

For example, if the job description highlights leadership as a key competency, you might bring up a scenario where you spearheaded a community service project or captained a sports team. These instances, although outside the typical professional domain, demonstrate transferable skills and qualities that are invaluable in the workplace.

Remember to use these examples sparingly and only when a suitable work-related example isn't available. The main goal remains to illustrate your professional prowess and potential value to the employer. By thoughtfully incorporating examples from different areas of your life, you can present a more holistic view of your skills and attributes, potentially setting you apart from other candidates.

Be Honest and Authentic

Being honest and authentic in your responses to behavioral interview questions is crucial. Employers often ask behavioral questions that can reveal much about a candidate's experience and testing them on their authenticity. Answering questions truthfully and providing your unique perspective without exaggeration is essential. Do not be afraid to discuss a mistake or an unsuccessful experience, as it shows humility and authenticity. By being truthful, you establish trust with the interviewer and convey that you are a person of integrity. It is also important to remember that behavioral interviews are designed to break through the prepared answers one might rehearse. Thus, being authentic and honest can help you communicate effectively and set the tone for the entire interview.

Listen Carefully to the Interviewer and Ask Questions

Active listening and asking clarifying questions can showcase your ability to communicate effectively during a behavioral interview. Listen carefully and attentively to the interviewer's questions, and use active listening techniques such as nodding and summarizing to show that you understand what they are asking. If you don't understand a particular question, politely

ask for clarification. Make a conscious effort not to interrupt or move ahead until the interviewer has finished with the question. After answering the question, ask the interviewer if you've provided sufficient detail and see if they were able to get your point across. This will show the interviewer that you are articulate and are willing to work collaboratively one-on-one or in a team setting.

Showcase Your Competence and Align Your Experience with Job Requirements

In the course of a behavioral interview, it's crucial to convincingly demonstrate your competence and skills while also ensuring that your experiences align closely with the job requirements. This requires a thorough understanding of the role's key responsibilities and a strategic approach to presenting your qualifications and experiences.

Start by highlighting your relevant experiences, technical knowledge, and transferable skills in the context of the job's requirements. In your responses, be as specific as possible to showcase your expertise in the field. For instance, share instances where you've leveraged these skills to drive successful outcomes in your past roles. This will help potential employers understand your value proposition and why you are a compelling fit for the job.

However, simply answering the questions is not enough. The key is to emphasize your unique strengths that make you stand out from other candidates. Show the depth of your experience, your ability to adapt to new situations, and your potential to add value to their organization.

In essence, your job in a behavioral interview is to tell a compelling story—one that shows you have the competence, skills, and experiences to not only meet the job requirements but excel in the role.

Be Confident and Positive

Lights, camera, action! You're the star of the show, and it's time to hit the stage with confidence! From the moment you step into the room, your energy will speak volumes. You know you've got what it takes to nail this interview, so let that self-assuredness guide you. Smile, maintain eye contact, and let your body language sing a tune of positivity.

Speak with clarity and purpose, weaving together your experiences and skills into a compelling narrative. Let the excitement in your voice ring out, underscoring your genuine interest in the role. The way you communicate can have a transformative effect on how your responses are perceived – much like the fascinating "truth effect."

Ever heard of it? The truth effect is a psychological phenomenon where confidence in your responses can create a reinforcing loop of believability and authenticity. The more self-assured you are, the more believable your statements become to the interviewer. Conversely if you are not very confident, the interviewer may begin to have doubts about your story.

It's not just about impressing the interviewer, though; it's also about creating a comfortable environment. Being relaxed and positive can make the whole process more enjoyable and productive for both parties. Keep in mind that this interview is a two-way street, a mutual exploration of fit. So, express your vibrant personality and let them see what a fantastic addition you'd be to their team!

Share Stories that Reflect Your Desired Level

I cannot stress enough how important it is to share stories that reflect your desired level. For example, when interviewing for a senior role, it's crucial to share experiences and stories that demonstrate your capacity to operate at, or above, the level of the job you're seeking. Your stories should reflect the complexity and scope that align with the position's requirements. If your stories revolve around situations and solutions that someone at a more junior level could manage, you risk being perceived as not quite up to par, which could result in being passed over for the role or down-leveled to a lower-level position.

As a rule of thumb, prioritize recent, relevant stories that showcase your current abilities, expertise, and understanding of high-level responsibilities. Sharing examples from the early stages of your career when you were in a lower-level role may not adequately exhibit the breadth and depth of your experience or skills pertinent to the position you're vying for. Keep in mind: your stories should convey not just what you've done, but the caliber of professional you are now.

Showcase Your Personality and Soft Skills

Apart from technical skills and experience, the interviewer will also be looking for evidence of soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Demonstrate your skills by providing examples of situations where you have used them effectively. Remember, behavioral interview questions are designed to assess how you would act in specific work-related situations. Use your responses to showcase your ability to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts in the workplace. Employers want to hire candidates that not only have the technical expertise but also the interpersonal skills to succeed in the role.

Keep Your Answers Concise and to the Point

In the context of an interview, precision and clarity are essential. While providing comprehensive answers to the interviewer's questions is essential, avoiding rambling or sharing irrelevant details is equally important. The interviewer's time is valuable, and your goal should be to convey your suitability for the role most concisely and compellingly as possible. This will also allow them to make it through all their questions. Often, interviewers have a fixed set of questions they must go through, and talking too long can prevent them from doing so, which is not good for your candidacy.

But also remember that an interview is a conversation, not a monologue. Be mindful of the length of your responses; typically, aim to speak for no more than two minutes at a time.

Staying concise and on point gives the interviewer space to interject with their thoughts or follow-up questions. Be open to interruptions and ready to adapt your responses based on their feedback or the questions they ask. Watch for cues to ensure they are following your narrative. If they seem confused or lose interest, it's a sign that you may need to make your points more clearly or add more context.

Keeping the interviewer engaged with you will show that you are not only well-prepared and organized, but also that you are an effective and considerate communicator. This is a skill that will serve you well in any professional environment.

Address Any Concerns or Questions the Interviewer May Have

If the interviewer has any concerns or questions about your experience or qualifications, be ready to address them clearly and concisely. Use specific examples and data to illustrate your points and put their concerns to rest. Don't be afraid to ask questions to clarify any confusion and show that you are engaged and interested in the conversation. Remember, it's better to address concerns during the interview rather than leave the interviewer with doubts about your abilities. Being able to overcome objections and reassure the interviewer will go a long way in convincing them that you are the right candidate for the job.

Leave a Lasting Impression

Finally, it's essential to leave a lasting impression on the interviewer. Thank them for their time and consideration, and reiterate why you are the best candidate for the role. If you feel that the conversation went well, don't be afraid to express your enthusiasm for the position and ask about the next steps in the hiring process.

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About the Author

Vidal Graupera (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/vidalgraupera/>) is an experienced engineering leader. He is an engineering manager at LinkedIn. Previously, Vidal was an engineering manager at Uber, Autodesk, and WalmartLabs. Vidal holds engineering degrees from Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Southern CA, and also an MBA from Santa Clara University. He served in the US Navy Reserve as an Engineering Duty Officer. A son of Cuban immigrants, Vidal was born in Miami, FL.

Beyond his professional achievements, Vidal is also a prolific author and content creator. He is the author of several highly regarded books, including

- "The Software Engineering Manager Interview Guide"
- "Effective One-on-Ones: A Handbook for Managers – The Ultimate Guide to Building Stronger Relationships with Your Team"
- "Time Management for Engineering Managers"
- "How to Write an Engineering Manager Resume"
- "Engineering Leadership Interviews: Lessons Learned and Best Practices Gathered from Interviews with Top Engineering Leaders Around the World"

These books are essential reading for anyone looking to advance their career in software engineering or engineering management.

In addition to his work as an author, Vidal is also the creator and host of the popular "Managers Club" website (<https://www.managersclub.com>) and podcast. On this platform, he shares insights and best practices for engineering leaders and managers, and interviews successful leaders from around the world. Through these efforts, Vidal has established himself as a leading voice in the tech industry, and a valuable resource for anyone looking to excel in their career.