

CHAPTER

4

401 Interview Questions

The ability to find the right question is more than half the battle of finding the answer.

—Thomas J. Watson

HERE IS THE HEART of the book: specific Behavior-Based Interview questions that you can use to predict, accurately and with confidence, a candidate's potential for success on the job.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, it is essential that you first identify job-related success factors (technical skills and knowledge, behaviors and performance skills, and motivations) that are matched to the essential functions of the job. You will then use Behavior-Based Interview questions to determine if the candidate has a history that demonstrates strengths and abilities in these competency areas.

We begin our sample questions with *icebreakers* that you can use during the first few minutes of greeting a candidate. Then you'll find Behavior-Based questions related to *technical skills and knowledge* and *behaviors and performance skills*. These are grouped into 50 competency areas, listed in alphabetical order. Locate the specific competency you

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are trying to assess, and you will find questions that you can assign to your interview team. Refer to Chapter 3 to learn how to determine which competency areas are most important in your future employee. Then search the list for the 10 or 12 you determine to be the most crucial.

Questions related to *motivations* come next. Remember, these allow you to determine that the candidate not only *can* do the job but *will* do the job. These job-fit and company-fit questions are an excellent tool for identifying the most appropriate candidate when several candidates have comparable knowledge, experience, and proficiencies. They are the key to employee satisfaction and retention.

Next, we have compiled a list of *probes* or *follow-up questions* that you can use to gather more information and ensure that you are collecting complete SAR stories.

We conclude with examples of *traditional* and *situational* questions that you can use at various points during your interviews. These are perhaps most helpful when you are gathering information related to functional capabilities. For example, it is quite valid to ask, “What is your experience with C++ programming?” You can follow up this *traditional* question with some Behavior-Based questions that will shed light on the candidate’s ability to apply this experience in a team setting or under severe time pressures.

A number of questions begin with the qualifier “for managers.” Designed to assess a person’s ability to lead, motivate, direct, and develop staff under supervision, these questions can be used both with experienced managers and with those who have never held the title of “manager.” Such candidates can share SARs about team experiences, informal or interim management roles, or mentoring relationships that will enable you to determine their ability to perform in a management position.

A critical part of the Behavior-Based Interviewing process occurs after you have selected questions and used them in candidate interviews. Members of the interview team must evaluate a slate of candidates by comparing notes and reviewing each candidate’s responses. The entire process is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, from planning and preparation through interviewing, rating, and reaching consensus. Be sure you are familiar with all the steps in the process so that the Behavior-Based questions are an integral part of a well-thought-out process and not just an interesting way to get candidate information.

Breaking the Ice

Here is a resource list of introductory questions that you can ask to break the ice with candidates. Refer to Chapter 6 for important information on how to follow legal hiring practices and avoid bias even in general interview questions. Pick out the questions yourself or invite your interview team members to select the questions that they would enjoy using during the first few minutes of an interview.

Your goal with icebreaking questions is to build rapport and make candidates feel comfortable. Remember, interviewing can be a stressful situation. Candidates want to make a great impression and are anxious about answering tough questions. Ease into the conversation as you welcome the candidate, settle into comfortable seats, and begin the interview.

Icebreaking Questions

- Tell me about yourself. (This is a classic opener that many candidates have prepared for. Try to encourage the candidate to wrap up the response after a minute or so, and be careful about responding to information that might play into areas of bias—for example, if the candidate reveals that she grew up in another country or is a single parent.)
- Did you have any trouble finding our office?
- I hope you've been able to enjoy this glorious weather we're having.
- Have you been to our building before?
- I like your briefcase. Did you get it locally?
- Have you been enjoying the Olympics? (It's okay to comment on a universal event such as the Olympics or some other general current event, but don't invite discussion of local sports teams unless the team has just recently done something very notable. A nonfan might feel at a disadvantage.)
- Would you like some coffee or a glass of ice water?
- Have you ever seen downtown from this perspective?

If you have brought candidates in from other parts of the country, you might ask about their trip.

- I hope your trip from Montana has gone well.
- Did you run into a lot of traffic coming in from the airport?

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- Have you been getting this much rain in Miami?
- How do you like Chicago?

Icebreaking discussions should take up no more than 2 or 3 minutes of the interview, as you and the candidate settle down. You can then move smoothly into explaining the interview process and giving the candidate a clear understanding of what will occur that day.

Behavior-Based Interview Questions

Here are hundreds of sample Behavior-Based Interview questions you can use as you prepare for your own interviews. They are divided into 50 different competency areas (refer to the end of this chapter for a full list) to make them easy to navigate and to help you choose the best questions for the competency areas you specifically want to assess.

Competency 1: Adaptability/Flexibility

- Describe a situation in which you had to adjust to a change over which you had no control.
- Sometimes we all have to work with people whose style differs from our own. Can you tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a colleague's work style to finish an important project?
- Have you ever taken on an assignment without knowing how you were going to do it? What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Describe the most demanding manager you've ever worked for, and tell me how you adapted to his or her style.
- Sometimes we have jobs or projects that change in midstream. Tell me about a time when this happened to you and how you dealt with it.

Competency 2: Analysis

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a decision.
- Tell me about an analytical project you took on that was not in your job description. Why did you do it?
- How do you use numbers to measure business performance? Give me an example.

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- Describe one of your most difficult analyses. What made it difficult? Could you have done anything to make it easier? What was the result?
- What steps do you take to study a problem before making a decision? Use an example to illustrate this.
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze something without existing guidelines or examples. How did you approach the problem? What were the results?

Competency 3: Assertiveness

- Give me an example where your self-confidence allowed you to take action when others might have avoided it. What was the result?
- Have you ever held back from doing something that you felt should be done? Why, and what happened as a result?
- Tell me about a time when you felt like a “fish out of water.” What did you do to increase your comfort level?
- Describe a situation in which you had to give your manager some unwelcome news.
- Tell me about a time when you were assertive on someone else’s behalf.
- Describe a recent experience when you were faced with poor service or unacceptable quality. What did you do about it? What was the result?

Competency 4: Attention to Detail

- Tell me about some times when you found errors in your work. What caused them? What did you do about them?
- Give me some examples of times when you knew things were not going well with a particular project, process, or activity. How did you know? What did you do to correct the problems?
- Tell me about a time when your attention to detail benefited your company.
- We’ve all experienced something “slipping through the cracks.” Tell me about a time when this happened to you, what you did about it, and what, if anything, you did to prevent it from happening again.
- Describe a recent situation in which attention to detail was critical to success. How did you contribute?
- In many projects, it’s essential to keep track of details while still managing the big picture. Tell me about a project where you did

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this effectively. How did you make sure everything got done?
How did you stay focused on the larger goal?

Competency 5: Collaboration

- How do you stay informed about what is happening in other departments of your company? Be specific.
- What do you do when you are faced with problems you can't solve within your unit or team? Share an example.
- Have you built a resource network outside your department? Tell me about a time when this network paid off for you and your company.
- Tell me about a time when you collaborated with someone who had a very different style from yours. Was this a problem or a bonus?
- Describe a situation in which you worked collaboratively with people at very different levels from yourself—either much higher, much lower, or both.
- Tell me about a project you worked on that involved people from many different areas of the company. What did you do to make that project successful?

Competency 6: Commitment to Task

- Tell me about a time when you overcame very difficult challenges to get a job done.
- In the last year, what project or initiative did you abandon? Why? How could you have saved it?
- When have you been a “champion” for something you considered important? What did that entail?
- We all become discouraged from time to time. Think about a recent situation when you felt discouraged about not being able to complete a task.
- Share a story about a project that dragged out much longer than anticipated. What did you do to be sure it was completed?
- What prevents you from completing tasks you've been assigned? Give me two specific examples.

Competency 7: Conflict Management

- Have you ever worked with someone you did not get along with? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

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- Describe a recent situation in which you have had to work with someone who clearly did not like you. How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?
- Tell me about a situation in which you successfully resolved a conflict with another person. What was the outcome?
- Can you tell me about a time when your actions had a negative effect on others?
- Tell me about a time when you resolved a conflict with a customer.
- *For managers:* How do you handle conflict among your staff members? Describe a recent situation you faced and how you dealt with it.

Competency 8: Control

- Tell me about the systems you use to keep track of tasks and important events. Give me an example of a time when these systems failed and how you dealt with it.
- What ideas have you come up with that have given you better information with which to make decisions? Be specific.
- How do you track your progress on a key project or long-range goal? Illustrate using a recent project.
- Share an example of a time when you had to document a sequence of events after the fact. How accurate were you?
- *For managers:* Walk me through your process for keeping track of what your direct reports are doing. Be specific.
- *For managers:* What process do you use to document your employees' performance? Give me an example of this process in action.

Competency 9: Creativity/Innovation

- In your last position, what good idea did you come up with that was implemented?
- Think about a time when someone brought you an idea that was odd or unusual. What did you do about it?
- Tell me about the most creative work-related project you have completed.
- Give me an example of a time when you came up with a cost-cutting idea.
- What do you do differently from others who have held your job? Why? How has this benefited your company? Be specific.

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- Describe an innovative idea you developed that led to the success of a company initiative.
- Do you think of yourself as an “out-of-the-box” thinker? Can you give me a specific example of a creative solution that you came up with?
- What is the biggest contribution you have made to the profitability of a business?

Competency 10: Crisis Management

- Describe a recent time when your work was very hectic. What did you do to keep it under control? How many extra hours did you work? For how long?
- Crises usually require us to act quickly. In retrospect, how would you have handled a recent crisis differently, if you had been given more time to think before acting?
- Tell me about a crisis you could have prevented. Did you do anything differently after the crisis had passed?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a crisis at work. What was the situation, and what did you do to mitigate it?
- *For managers:* Tell me how you resolve crises by deploying your team members. Give me a specific example.
- *For managers:* What do you do to keep team spirits up during a crisis situation? Give me a recent example.

Competency 11: Customer Focus/Customer Service Orientation

- Tell me about the most difficult customer situation you have ever handled. What did you do, and what was the outcome?
- What do you do when a customer is irate? Give me a specific example.
- Tell me about the last time a coworker asked you for help at a time when you were very busy with work of your own. What was the situation? What did you do?
- Describe a recent customer complaint that you handled. What was the complaint? How did you learn about it? How did it turn out?
- What lessons have you learned about keeping the customer satisfied? How did you learn them? Give me an example of how you learned one of these lessons.

- Can you think of a time when your loyalty was divided between the customer and the company? Tell me about it. What did you do?

Competency 12: Deadline Responsiveness

- Tell me about a time when you missed an important deadline. How could you have avoided this?
- How do you ensure that you keep projects on schedule and complete tasks on time? Describe your process, using a recent example.
- Give me an example of when you met an “impossible” deadline. How did that make you feel?
- Tell me about your most deadline-driven job, and give me some examples of deadlines you met and those you missed.
- What do you do when you are faced with an inflexible deadline and not enough time or resources to complete the task? Give me a specific example.
- When deadlines loom, sometimes something has to give. Tell me about a time when you compromised quality or skimped on a process to meet a deadline. How did you choose what to compromise? What was the outcome?

Competency 13: Dealing with Change

- What problems are you currently working on that came as a surprise to you?
- Tell me about a time when you were surprised by a change at work. How did you deal with it?
- What was your most challenging career transition? What did you do to make it successful?
- Walk me through the steps you took to acclimate yourself during the first week in your job at [company].
- Give me an example of a time when you responded quickly to a change. What was the situation? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you did not deal well with a change. What prevented you? What could you have done differently? What was the outcome?

Competency 14: Decision Making/Decisiveness/Judgment

- What is the most difficult business decision you have had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?

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- Describe a situation in which you had to make a decision without having all the information you needed. How did you make this decision?
- We don't always have the luxury of time when making decisions. Can you give me an example of a decision you had to make in a hurry?
- Tell me about a complex decision that you made recently. How did you make the decision? What were the key elements you considered? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about the last time you made a decision when the instructions you were given were unclear, ambiguous, or contradictory. How did you decide what to do? What alternatives did you consider? How did the decision work out?
- Tell me about the kinds of decisions you make rapidly, and those you ponder longer. Share specific examples.
- Tell me about a decision you made that turned out badly. In hindsight, what would you have done differently?
- How do you balance instinct with facts when making decisions? Give me a specific example.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- *For managers:* Do you include your subordinates in your decision-making process? Give me an example in which their input was critical, and an example in which you overrode their recommendations.

Competency 15: Delegation

- Tell me about your biggest mistake in delegating. Why did you make this mistake?
- Give me an example of a time when you required help from your staff to deal with a major problem. How much authority did you delegate to them?
- Please discuss a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Tell me about a time when you should have delegated but did not. What were the repercussions?
- Tell me about an instance when you delegated work to another person who didn't get the job done. Why did it happen? What did you do about it?
- How do you determine which staff members should handle which assignments? Illustrate with some examples.

Competency 16: Fact Finding

- Tell me about a time when you had to review detailed reports or documents to identify a problem.
- When you are given a new assignment, what is your procedure for gathering background information? Give me an example.
- Describe a situation that required you to interview several people to obtain some critical information. How did you know what to ask?
- Give an example that illustrates how you use fact-finding skills to gather information to solve a problem.
- Think of a time when the information you gathered was used to make a critical business decision. Was your information accurate and complete? How did the decision work out?
- Give me an example of a time when you made a poor decision because the facts you gathered were incorrect or incomplete.

Competency 17: Follow-up

- Tell me about the systems and processes that you use to ensure good follow-up. Walk me through the follow-up steps of a recent project.
- Describe a situation in which your follow-up was credited for capturing a business opportunity.
- We've all experienced times when we have forgotten to follow up. Tell me about one of those times. What did you learn from this that you used later? How did you use it?
- Tell me about some follow-up tasks that you have enjoyed and some that you have found difficult.

Competency 18: Goal Orientation/Goal Setting

- Tell me about a recent goal that you set and achieved. Walk me through your thinking and planning processes.
- Give an example of a goal that you did not reach. How did you feel about that? What could you have done differently?
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too low.
- Tell me about an instance when you were unwilling to make the necessary sacrifice to achieve a goal.
- Think of a job you held where your goals were not clearly defined. What did you do about it?

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- Describe a time when you inspired someone on your work team.
- Please tell me of an occasion when you were able to turn around the opinion of a group.
- Describe a time when you were nominated for a leadership role. Why do you think that happened? What was the outcome?
- With what groups or individuals do you have the greatest impact? Please share some examples.

Competency 20: Independence

- Tell me about some on-the-job rules or policies you didn't agree with. What did you do about it?
- What do you do in your job that isn't covered in your job description?
- Tell me about a situation in which you took matters into your own hands, even though it should have been handled by your manager. What was the outcome?
- Think about the boss who has given you the most independence. How did you respond? What problems did you encounter?
- Can you share an example of a situation in which you had to go against general feelings or policies to achieve a goal?
- In your current job, what constraints make it difficult to get things done? What do you do about them?

Competency 21: Initiative

- Sometimes opportunities come disguised as problems. Can you tell me about a time when you realized an opportunity? What did you do? What were the results?
- How did you get your job at [company]?
- Describe some ways in which you changed your job at [company]. What were the results?
- What do you do that is different from others in your profession? Give me an example of how that has worked out well for your employer.
- Tell me about a project that you initiated. What did you do? Why? What was the outcome?
- *For managers:* Describe some ways you have found to make your employees' jobs easier. What have been the benefits?

Competency 22: Integrity

- Think about a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a business situation in which you felt it was best not to be honest. What did you do?
- Describe a company policy that you conformed to but did not agree with. Why?
- Sometimes we all bend or stretch the truth just a bit—to succeed in something important, make a big sale, or avoid an unpleasant situation. Give me some examples of when you have done this. How did you feel about it?
- Tell me about a situation in which your manager asked you to do something that you didn't agree with. How did you handle this situation?
- Tell me about a time when you saw someone bend too far, when you questioned their integrity. What did you do?

Competency 23: Interpersonal Skills

- Give me a specific example of when you had to work with a difficult customer.
- Describe some situations in which you wished you'd acted differently with someone. What did you do? What happened?
- Tell me about a work situation that required you to adapt to a wide variety of people. What did you find difficult about that? What did you enjoy?
- Most of us have worked with people with whom we don't get along very well. How have you handled this in the past? Give me a specific example.
- *For managers:* What specific problems have members of your team brought to you recently? How did you handle them?
- *For managers:* All managers must deal with problem employees from time to time. Give me a recent example of when you had to deal with an employee who was causing a problem. What did you say? What did you do?

Competency 24: Leadership

- Describe a recent initiative that you led. What obstacles did you face in reaching your goals? How did you overcome them?

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- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to coordinate several people to achieve a goal. What prompted you to take the lead? How did you go about coordinating and leading the group? How did the group members respond to your leadership?
- Have you ever had to step in in midstream to rescue a project that was failing? What did you do, and what were the results? How did you gain the support of your team?
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to lead many people to achieve a goal.
- Share an experience in which you had to lead a technical team whose members had more expertise than you had. How did you deal with that?
- Describe a recent project you led that fell short of its goals. What were your obstacles? Why were they insurmountable? In retrospect, what would you have done differently?
- Tell me about a new policy or idea you implemented that was a considerable change from your standard procedures. What did you do to get people to go along with it?
- Describe a recent situation that illustrates your style in taking charge and leading others to achieve a goal.
- What are some of the most difficult one-on-one meetings you've had with employees? Why were they difficult? How could you have made them easier?
- Describe a group you led whose members didn't work well together. What did you do to improve teamwork?
- How do you communicate change to your group? Share some examples.
- Tell me about a time when you had to get an extra effort from your group. What did you do to motivate them? How did they respond?
- Have you ever had to fire an employee? What were the circumstances? How did you handle it?
- One of the most difficult leadership challenges is getting results from people over whom you have no direct authority. Can you give me any examples of how you've done that?

Competency 25: Learner Attitude

- Tell me about a recent situation that you would describe as a real learning experience. What did you learn? How have you applied it since then?
- Describe a decision you made that you would handle differently if you had to do it over again.
- What tricks or techniques have you learned to make a job easier? How did you learn them?
- Tell me about a recent training course you've taken. Why did you decide to take it? How has it helped you in your job? Give me a specific example.
- Think about a time when you had to learn new responsibilities. How did you learn them? How long did it take? What problems did you encounter?
- Give me some specific examples of different ways you've learned—in classroom settings, books, online, tele-training. Which did you find most effective? Why?

Competency 26: Listening

- We've all had times when we've misinterpreted something that someone told us. Give me an example of when this happened to you and what you did about it.
- 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 being expressed.
- Tell me about some of your assignments that required you to rely on oral information to get the job done. Did you have any problems with that?
- Tell me about a time when critical information had to be relayed in a hurry. What was the outcome?

Competency 27: Logic

- Tell me about a complex problem that you solved recently. How did you decide what to do? What were the key elements that you considered? What was the outcome?
- Give me an example of when you used instinct instead of logic to solve a problem. What was the result? How did you feel about it?

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- Tell me about a time when your logical solution was overridden by someone senior at your company. How did that make you feel? What was the outcome?
- Describe your thought process when analyzing data to come to a decision. Share an example.

Competency 28: Negotiation

- Tell me about your most creative negotiation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work hard to rescue a stalled negotiation. What did you do? What was the result?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to compromise to reach an agreement with someone. Did you feel the resolution was fair?
- Tell me about one of your negotiations that was unsuccessful. What was the fallout? What could you have done differently?
- What information do you gather before a negotiation, and how do you use this information during the negotiating process? Share some specific examples.
- What strengths do you bring to the negotiating table? Give me an example of how you have used these strengths during a negotiation.

Competency 29: Oral Communication

- Tell me about an instance in which you were unable to get your point across to someone on the telephone. How could you have avoided this problem?
- Tell me about a time when you had to be assertive to get across a point that was important to you.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to communicate bad news to someone.
- Describe a complex process, product, situation, or rule that you had to explain to someone. How did you know you were successful in getting your point across?
- Describe a time when you were able to gain support for an unpopular decision. What communications strategies did you use?
- Describe any formal or informal experience you have had in training someone else. How successful were you?

Competency 30: Persistence/Tenacity

- Have you ever been accused of giving up too soon? What was the situation?
- Tell me about a long-range goal that you achieved recently. How did you ensure that you were making progress over many weeks or months?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to reach a goal because you refused to give up. How long did you persist?
- What are some big obstacles that you've had to overcome in order to get where you are today? How did you overcome them?

Competency 31: Persuasiveness

- Relate an experience in which you were able to get others to follow your lead.
- How successful are you at getting people to do what you want them to do? What approach do you take? Give me two examples.
- What is the best idea you ever sold to your boss? What was your approach?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to convince someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you were unable to sell an idea or plan that you thought was the best approach. Why were you unsuccessful? What could you have done differently?
- Do you consider yourself a "natural salesperson"? Share some stories that illustrate this.
- Tell me about a time when you were able to turn someone's opinion completely around. How did you convince that person?

Competency 32: Planning and Organizing

- Give me a specific example of a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks? Tell me about your action plan.
- Tell me about a time when you organized an event that was very successful.
- Give me an example of an event or project that you planned on very short notice.
- Recall a time when you were assigned a complex project. What steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently?

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- Describe a project you led that involved many team members. How did you make the best use of your resources?
- Tell me about a time when lack of organization caused you to miss an opportunity or a deadline. What did you do to prevent that from happening again?

Competency 33: Presentation

- Tell me about a recent successful experience making a speech or giving a presentation.
- When you are preparing and giving an oral presentation, how do you take your audience's needs into consideration? Give me an example.
- Have you ever been appointed spokesperson for a group? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about a time when you gave a presentation to a challenging audience. How did you deal with that audience? What was the outcome?

Competency 34: Priority Setting

- What do you do when you have too many tasks to accomplish in the time allowed? Give me a specific example.
- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- We have all faced short deadlines for important projects. How do you decide what to do first? Give me an example.
- How do you make sure that you are spending time on projects that are important but not necessarily urgent? Give me a recent example.

Competency 35: Problem Solving

- Tell me about the most perplexing problem you have faced in the last year.
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a big problem. Give me an example of when you have done this.
- Describe a situation in which your manager was not available and a problem arose that needed immediate attention. How did you handle it?
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.

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- Tell me about a time when you came up with a solution to a problem that others had not been able to solve for quite a while.
- In your last job, what problems did you identify that had previously been overlooked? What did you do about them?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with in your current job? How do you address them? Share some examples.
- Give me an example of a business problem you solved on your own, and one you solved with a group. How did your process differ?

Competency 36: Rapport Building

- How do you “break the ice” with clients? With coworkers? With subordinates? With your manager? Share some examples.
- Tell me about a time when you built rapport with a difficult customer.
- Describe a situation in which you were a new member of an existing group. How did you build rapport with your team members?
- Tell me about a business situation in which you found it difficult to establish rapport with someone. What was the outcome?

Competency 37: Resilience

- We all experience disappointments in life. Can you give me an example of how you coped with a work-related disappointment?
- Describe a recent situation that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about an idea of yours that you could not implement. What happened, and how did that make you feel?
- What kinds of obstacles have you faced to get where you are today? How did you keep going when things didn’t go your way? Give me some examples.

Competency 38: Resourcefulness

- Tell me about a problem that you’ve solved in an unusual way.
- How did you build your network of resources at your current job?
- Describe a situation in which you were blocked from reaching a goal. What did you do?
- Describe an instance in which you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a problem.
- What is the most unusual request you’ve received at work in the last year? How did you respond?

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- Have you ever been given an assignment to do but not the resources to do it? How did you handle it? Give me a specific example.

Competency 39: Risk Taking

- Tell me about a risky move you made at work and why you made it.
- Describe a situation in which you made a decision without having all the necessary information. How did you decide?
- Describe a major transition in your career. What prompted you to make this change?
- Give me an example of a time when you decided not to take action, even though you were pressured to do so. How did you evaluate the situation? What was the result?

Competency 40: Sensitivity to Others

- When you are dealing with individuals or groups, how do you know when you are pushing too hard? What do you do about it? Share an example.
- Tell me about a time when a colleague was going through a rough time at work. How did you know? What actions did you take?
- Have you ever found it necessary to change your actions or behaviors to respond to the needs of another person? What was the situation?
- Discuss a time when you worked to understand a perspective different from your own. What was the outcome?

Competency 41: Staff Development

- *For managers:* Tell me about a person you managed who has advanced in his or her career. What role did you play?
- *For managers:* Tell me about the last person you hired who just didn't work out. What was the problem? How did you try to correct it? What was the outcome?
- *For managers:* Give me a specific example of how you have empowered your staff to make independent decisions.
- *For managers:* Describe a training program you implemented for your staff. How did you identify the need? How did you select the solution? What were the results?

- *For managers:* Tell me about a staff member who had a development need that you documented on his or her performance evaluation. What happened as a result? How did you help?
- *For managers:* Give an example of when you coached someone through a difficult situation. What did you advise? What was the outcome?

Competency 42: Strategic Planning

- Describe a situation in which you anticipated the future and made changes to current products to meet future customer needs.
- Describe a time when there were competitive threats in your marketplace and you developed actions to compete.
- Give me an example of when you identified and assessed a new business opportunity.
- How did you go about setting objectives for your group this year? Be specific.
- Have you ever recognized a problem before your manager or others in the organization recognized it? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about an idea or project you conceived recently. How did you know it was needed? How did you know it would work? What was the outcome?

Competency 43: Team Building

- Describe a situation in which you developed a group into a strong working team.
- Tell me about an instance in which you were able to build team spirit in a time of low morale.
- Tell me about the most challenging team project you have led. What did you do to ensure its success?
- Tell me some ways in which you have contributed to team effectiveness when you were not a designated team leader.

Competency 44: Teamwork

- Tell me about the most successful team you have ever been on. What made it work?
- Describe a time when team members had to arrive at a compromise to get the job done. What was your role in making that happen?

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- Tell me about a specific time when a team member wasn't contributing to a project you were working on. What was the situation, and what steps did you take to resolve the problem? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when your team did not agree with your ideas. How did you deal with the situation?
- Not all teams are compatible. Think of a team you worked with whose members didn't get along. What happened?
- How have you handled conflict or criticism within a team you've been on? What was the outcome?

Competency 45: Technical and Professional Knowledge and Proficiency

In addition to the general competency questions included here, you will need to develop customized questions to assess the professional/technical knowledge and skills required for the position at hand. For example, for a manufacturing worker, you will need to find out about equipment operation skills and safety awareness. For a public relations executive, you might want to assess media relations skills. A programmer must be competent in the specific languages and systems used by your company. In addition to Behavior-Based questions, you will want to include in your Interview Guide a series of traditional and situational questions to gather this information; examples are included later in this chapter.

- Sometimes it is easy to get in over your head. Tell me about a time when you had to request help or assistance for a project or assignment that was beyond your capability.
- Give me an example of how you applied your existing knowledge to a new assignment.
- Tell me about a time when you were called in as the technical expert for a project. What value did you bring? How did the project turn out?
- Give me an example of how you acquired a technical skill and converted it into a practical application.

Competency 46: Time Management

- What do you do when your time schedule is disrupted by unforeseen circumstances? Share a specific example.
- How do you manage your schedule so that you have time for important projects as well as day-to-day responsibilities? Please share a specific example.

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- What prevents you from completing daily tasks? Walk me through a recent day on the job.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work overtime or extra hours to get an important job done. In retrospect, what could you have done differently to reduce your overtime hours?

Competency 47: Tolerance for Stress

- How do you deal with pressure in your job? Give me specific examples.
- Tell me about an unexpectedly stressful situation you experienced at work. How did you handle it?
- Have you ever had a feeling of frustration and impatience when dealing with a customer? What was the situation?
- Give me some examples of when your ideas were strongly opposed in a meeting. How did you react?
- What are the highest-pressure situations that you've faced in recent years? How did you cope?
- Think of your most productive work experience. What stress levels were you under? Did that add to or hinder your productivity?

Competency 48: Versatility

- Tell me about a time when you were required to “wear many hats.”
- Describe a time when you were working on several projects at once. How did you make the transition from one to the next over the course of a day?
- Tell me about a time when your manager called on you to take on a special project outside your usual area of activity. Why were you selected? What was the outcome?
- Share a situation in which you were required to change the way you normally work and found it difficult to do so.

Competency 49: Work Standards

- Tell me about a time when you were required to turn in what you felt was not your best work. What was the situation? How did it make you feel?
- Give me two examples of things you've done in previous jobs that show your willingness to work hard.
- Have you disagreed with a manager's evaluation of your performance? How did you handle the situation?

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- Share an example of when you weren't very pleased with your work performance. What did you do about it?
- In your current position, how do you define doing a good job? Give me some examples of when your definition was not met and what you did about it.
- Describe a time when your results did not meet your manager's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
- Consider times when you did your best work and other times when you didn't. Give me an example of each time. What made the difference?
- *For managers:* How do you judge the performance of your employees? What distinguishes "good" from "average"? Tell me about an employee you evaluated as "average" and how you helped him or her to become "good."

Competency 50: Written Communication

- Tell me about a time when you used your written communication skills to get an important point across.
- Describe a difficult writing challenge. Could you have done something different to make it easier?
- Describe a report or proposal that you wrote that was very effective. How did you know? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you used written communication to turn around someone's opinion. Did you enjoy the challenge?
- Tell me about some of the typical written assignments in your last position. Which ones were most challenging? Which did you enjoy most? Give me specific examples.
- Describe the most significant written document that you have had to complete. What was riding on it?

**Behavior-Based Interview Questions for Job
and Company Fit or for Motivation**

Not every individual who qualifies for a job is a good fit for the job or the company. The following questions will help you assess whether an individual will perform well within the specific structure of the job and the culture of the company. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions, but you need to keep in mind what will be expected of

the individual holding the job. For example, the first question asks about a structured versus an unstructured environment. If the position is in a highly structured department or would report to a highly structured boss, someone who thrives best in an unstructured environment might be constantly chafing against the environment of the job or become unproductive within its confines. The third question delves into what makes an individual look forward to going to work every day. When you ask this question, assess the response against the structure, environment, mission, and culture of the specific job and of the company to see if this candidate will be motivated and energetic. The seventh question, “Why did you choose this type of work?” might reveal insights into a person’s motivations and passions that can be very valuable in assessing fit.

These job- or company-fit questions are especially helpful when you have narrowed down your slate of candidates to a handful of qualified individuals. All of them have the skills, knowledge, and performance traits that will enable them to be successful. Yet there will be subtle or not-so-subtle differences in what motivates, energizes, and stimulates them on the job. Tie the answers you get to the job-related competencies that are critical for your open position and to the opportunities available in the job and at your company. These questions will help you assess their differences so you can make the best choice for your specific opening.

- Give me an example of when you had to deal with an unstructured environment in which there was a lot of change.
- Give me an example of when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- When did you love what you were doing? Give me a specific example.
- When did you hate what you were doing? Describe the situation.
- What gave you the greatest feeling of achievement in your job at [company]? Why was this so satisfying?
- Describe the time when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.
- Why did you choose this type of work?
- Give me some examples of activities in your last job that were satisfying and some that were less satisfying.

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TIP: As we mentioned in Chapter 3, you can add a motivational component to almost any Behavior-Based Interview question. Simply follow up the response by asking, “How satisfied/dissatisfied were you with that?” and you will gain insight into the unique motivators for that candidate.

- All jobs have their difficulties and frustrations. Tell me some specific tasks or assignments that you found dissatisfying. Why were you dissatisfied, and what did you do about it?
- Can you tell me about a time when you took on responsibilities outside your job description? Why did you do that?
- What people or events have been the most important in your professional development?
- What have you done in your last job that makes you feel most proud?
- Tell me about the last time you became frustrated at work.
- Tell me about a particularly boring or distasteful task you have faced in the last year or so. What made it boring or distasteful? What did you do to ensure that the task was accomplished?
- What did you like best about your job at [company]?
- What were your reasons for leaving?
- Tell me about some recent responsibilities you have taken on. Was this your own idea?
- Tell me about a performance evaluation that pointed out a development need. How did your manager present this to you? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it, and what was the result?
- Tell me about the most difficult group of people you’ve worked with.
- Tell me about the best boss you’ve had. Be specific.
- What motivates you to work hard? Give me some examples.

Follow-up Questions (Probes)

Candidates don’t always provide a complete SAR story in their response. Because you need to document the entire situation, action, and result to assess the candidate fairly on that particular competency, you will need to use probing questions to draw out additional details and prompt a complete SAR response. You can add to your toolkit these sample probing questions:

- And then what happened?
- Can you tell me more about . . . ?
- Did you feel well prepared for that? What did you do to prepare?
- Do you wish you had done something differently? Please explain.
- Give me another example.
- How did it turn out?
- How did they respond?
- How did you feel about that?
- How did you get involved?
- How did you make that happen?
- How did you prepare for that?
- How did you resolve that?
- How did your team react?
- Lead me through your thought process.
- That sounds difficult. Tell me more about how you did it.
- Tell me more about . . .
- Tell me more about the obstacles you were facing.
- Was that difficult for you?
- Was your manager pleased?
- Were you happy with that result?
- What actions did you take?
- What did you do next?
- What did you learn from that?
- What did the other person say?
- What did you say?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What happened next?
- What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome them?
- What was most difficult about that?
- What was the outcome?
- What was your reaction?
- What was your reasoning?
- What was your role?
- What were you thinking at that point?
- When did that occur?
- Who else was involved?
- Why did you decide to do that?
- Why did you take that action?

82 CHAPTER 4**Put Candidates at Ease**

Because Behavior-Based Interviewing is a structured process, interviewers are well prepared. Armed with their Interview Guides, they are ready to move through their preselected questions and probes and take notes on each candidate's SARs. Especially for those new to Behavior-Based Interviewing, this structure and preparation might lead them to present a somewhat "clinical" appearance to candidates. Candidates might feel there is little give-and-take, that they are simply responding to questions without getting a reaction or response from the interviewer. This can be an off-putting experience.

When interviewing, try to pose your questions in a natural manner, and don't be afraid to inject your own natural reaction to a candidate's responses. "Wow, that sounds interesting." "I know what you mean, I really love a challenge, too." "You're right, the industry has undergone some dramatic changes." Even your probes and follow-up questions can relate back to something the candidate said, to promote the feeling of dialogue rather than interrogation. For example, "What an up-and-down experience! You said customers really liked the change. How do you know that? Did you track customer satisfaction scores?"

Always remember that the vast majority of candidates are nervous and keyed up. They want to make a great impression, and they want to establish rapport as well as answer questions. A smile, a warm manner, and visible responsiveness to their comments will help put them at ease. Don't get so wrapped up in asking questions and noting answers that you appear more a researcher than an interviewer.

Traditional and Situational Questions

As discussed extensively in the first three chapters of this book, traditional and situational interview questions do not provide interviewers with specific examples of a candidate's past behaviors. Rather, they allow the candidate to provide general information that he might or might not be able to support with a complete SAR. In addition, these types of questions might lead the candidate to provide information that she thinks the interviewer wants to hear. For example, if you asked a candidate interviewing for an accounting position, "What are your greatest strengths?" you might hear, "I have a natural affinity for numbers and I really understand how financial results relate to business success. I am very detail oriented, and I have excellent tracking and follow-up skills,

so that nothing slips through the cracks.” Good answer! Of course, you will want to probe further and gather evidence of those strengths in the form of SAR responses to Behavior-Based Interview questions. But traditional and situational questions can be very helpful in gathering information about credentials, educational qualifications, previous work environments, and job-related knowledge, and they can be a good way to build rapport before easing into Behavior-Based Interview questions.

In this section we provide sample *traditional* and *situational* questions that you might want to use as an initial screening tool or during the early stages of an interview. Then you can make the transition to Behavior-Based Interview questions to gather specific examples of when, where, how, and how successfully the specific skills were used.

Traditional Interview Questions

These questions will help you screen out a candidate who does not possess the essential competencies for the job. In many cases you can use these as a lead-in to a related Behavior-Based Interview question. For example, a very popular traditional interview question is, “What are your greatest strengths?” You can follow up the candidate’s response with a question that zeroes in on one of the key competencies for the position: “Tell me about a time when your attention to detail benefited your company.”

- Tell me about yourself. (*Note that this question is also listed in the beginning of this chapter as an icebreaker. It is a common way to begin an interview and might help to set a candidate at ease.*)
- What are your greatest strengths?
- What are your greatest weaknesses?
- Where do you want to be in five years?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What is your experience with [competency, skill, function, etc.]?
- Do you work well under pressure?
- Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower?
- Do you work well with teams?
- Do you prefer a structured or a loose working environment?
- Are you a risk taker?
- What will your colleagues say about you?
- How will your subordinates describe you?
- What is the greatest value you bring to your organization?
- Define your leadership and management style.

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- Describe your decision-making style.
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What are your views on continuing education? For yourself? For your employees?
- What have you been doing with your time since you left your last position?
- What have you done to improve your professional skills this year?
- What are you looking for in a new opportunity?
- What will you bring to this position that another candidate will not?
- How long do you expect to stay with our company?
- What are your compensation requirements?

Situational Interview Questions

Situational questions present hypothetical circumstances and give the candidate an opportunity to describe an “ideal” situation or how he “would” or “might” deal with a circumstance. These questions can be a good tool for gaining insight into a candidate’s thought processes, but the information gleaned must not be taken at face value—it must be validated with SARs that are prompted through Behavior-Based Interview questions. Good follow-up questions are those related to job fit, company fit, and motivations. For example, after asking, “How would you describe your ideal boss?” you can follow up with a job-fit question: “Tell me about the best boss you’ve had. Give me some specific examples of why he or she was so great to work for.”

- How would you describe your ideal position?
- How would you describe your ideal boss?
- When you are hiring, what do you look for as the most important attribute in a candidate?
- If you could change something about your career, what would it be and why?
- What type of person would you hire for this position?
- If we were to hire you, what would be the first thing you would do?
- What would you do if you had an employee who was consistently late for work?
- What would you do if a team member was not contributing to a project you were working on?
- What would you do in your first week on the job to ensure your long-term success with our company?

- How would you handle an irate customer?
- How would you deal with a communication problem at work?
- What would you do if you disagreed with a company policy?
- What would you do if your boss asked you to do something that you considered unethical?
- What would you do if your boss asked you to do something that was outside your job description?
- What would you do if you were asked to take on a new responsibility that you didn't feel prepared to handle?
- How do you deal with stress on the job?
- How would you handle a staff member's personal crisis that affected his or her work performance?
- Suppose we were to offer you the position of [job title]. If you could have only two other people working with you to meet the job challenges, what would those individuals be responsible for, and why?

Put It All Together

The questions in this chapter are a rich resource for your interview preparation. Not only will you find many specific Behavior-Based Interview questions that you can use exactly as written, but simply by reviewing the questions, you will gain a deeper understanding of how to phrase any additional questions you might need. The end result is that candidates will give you concrete, specific answers that are essential to accurately assessing their knowledge, skills, and motivators.

Integrated into the five-step process detailed in Chapter 3, these questions are the core of a successful Behavior-Based Interview program.

50 Competency Areas

1. Adaptability/Flexibility
2. Analysis
3. Assertiveness
4. Attention to Detail
5. Collaboration
6. Commitment to Task
7. Conflict Management
8. Control
9. Creativity/Innovation
10. Crisis Management

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11. Customer Focus/Customer Service Orientation
12. Deadline Responsiveness
13. Dealing with Change
14. Decision Making/Decisiveness/Judgment
15. Delegation
16. Fact Finding
17. Follow up
18. Goal Orientation/Goal Setting
19. Impact
20. Independence
21. Initiative
22. Integrity
23. Interpersonal Skills
24. Leadership
25. Learner Attitude
26. Listening
27. Logic
28. Negotiation
29. Oral Communication
30. Persistence/Tenacity
31. Persuasiveness
32. Planning and Organizing
33. Presentation
34. Priority Setting
35. Problem Solving
36. Rapport Building
37. Resilience
38. Resourcefulness
39. Risk Taking
40. Sensitivity to Others
41. Staff Development
42. Strategic Planning
43. Team Building
44. Teamwork
45. Technical and Professional Knowledge and Proficiency
46. Time Management
47. Tolerance for Stress
48. Versatility
49. Work Standards
50. Written Communication