

Featured, Talent Acquisition

# 11 Must-Ask Behavioral Interview Questions

October 16, 2017 | Posted by [Jacqui Barrett-Poindexter](#)



Behavioral interviewing uses strategically composed questions to generate word pictures of how a candidate's past performance supports a hiring company's future needs. Focusing in on both hard and soft skills, the questions drill down into several layers of a job seeker's value proposition, unearthing interview gold.

This type of questioning remains popular because it is the most pragmatic way to uncover real life work experiences. The answers, if articulated well, will convince the employer that the job seeker is a fit – or not – for an open opportunity.

While hundreds of behavioral interview questions are available to help the employer vet out their next great candidate, I believe the following 10 questions are absolutely must-asks:

**1. Tell me about a time where you felt defeated; e.g., your project was falling apart, you were unable to meet your boss's timeline goals, your idea was dismissed, etc. How did you respond to the adversity?**

\* Value of This Question: Unearths how self-motivated the candidate is when the job gets tough, and/or when they do not feel in control. How do they step up and unravel challenges of a failing project? Or, what actions do they take to ensure timelines are met on the next project? When ideas are passed over, do they

internalize the situation and, over time, get so frustrated that they decide to conduct a job search (and thus, this is why you are interviewing them today?), or, do they brainstorm with a coach or colleague, or even discuss with the boss who dismissed the idea, to find a better path to ideation?

**2. Describe a time when you were asked to perform a task or spearhead an initiative that went against your values. What did you do? What was the outcome?**

\* Value of This Question: Speaks to integrity and values and how the job seeker communicates their needs amid uncomfortable and uncertain situations. It also helps the hiring company to determine if there is a values-fit with this candidate.

**3. Think about the most exciting and energizing aspect of your current or most recent position. What did you specifically enjoy about it? Why?**

\* Value of This Question: Helps determine culture fit. For example, if the most energizing aspect of their job has been interacting with clients on a daily basis but there is no similar type of interaction in the prospective role, then further discovery may be in order to ensure fit.

**4. Think back to one of the most energy-depleting periods in your current or most recent position. What was going on? How did you respond to it? What was the outcome?**

\* Value of This Question: Again, this question helps determine culture fit. If the most depleting period of time was when the candidate regularly corresponded with clients, but they prefer working solitarily, then this job (especially if it continual customer correspondence) may not be a fit.

**5. Tell me about a time when you had too much to do, but not enough resources (this could include staffing, time, money). How did you handle the pressure, overcome the deficit and/or achieve goals?**

\* Value of This Question: Uncovers how the candidate responds to pressure and also their problem-solving skills. For example, if the employee shows how they bartered with a colleague for additional resources, then they prove out-of-the-box initiative (versus asking their boss for additional budgeting or resources that may not have been available).

**6. Describe a situation where you had to make a tough decision that normally would have been escalated to your boss. How did you handle the decision-making process? What was the result?**

\* Value of This Question: Provides insights about the job seeker's decisiveness as well as confidence. Moreover, asking what the result was helps to determine the quality of the candidate's decision.

**7. Tell me about a time when you went the extra mile when it would have been just as acceptable to perform the bare minimum? Why did you exert the effort? What was the outcome?**

\* Value of This Question: Delivers insights into the candidate's drive, and the 'why' behind the initiative. Is the candidate internally driven to always push that extra mile, or was this a one-and-done? If a one-and-done, then what was their motivator? Was it team-driven, was it for a greater company good, or, perhaps they wanted to prove being ready for the next promotion, for example.

**8. Describe a situation where you and a colleague whom you relied upon for support (e.g., to complete a project) were in conflict? How did you address the situation?**

\* Value of This Question: Unearths the candidate's conflict resolution abilities. It also may illustrate how flexible the candidate is in adapting their expectations and/or behaving with humility to achieve a greater organizational good.

**9. Provide an example of a difficult situation with a major client that you had to resolve. What steps did you take? What was the outcome?**

\* Value of This Question: Exposes the candidate's advanced customer relationship management skills, as well as tenacity in problem solving. It also reveals how well they connect the dots between a problem and a meaningful outcome. Even better if they can measure the results or articulate how their resolution contributed to longer term gains.

**10. Tell me about a time when you had to convince another staff member or leader, whom you had no direct authority over, to buy into a new idea or project? How did you accomplish this?**

\* Value of This Question: Brings light to the interviewee's influence skills. How well can they gain idea buy-in from someone who does not report to them? How well do they function in a matrix environment? Moreover, it sheds light on communication abilities.

**11. Tell me about a time you made a blunder on the job that cost your company time or money. How did you handle the aftermath?**

\* Value of This Question: Uncovers the candidate's ability to own their mistakes and also demonstrates their ability to rectify the situation immediately or if that's not possible, to prove they've learned from their mistakes and have put measures in place to avoid them happening again.

By tapping into these top 11 questions as well as adapting behavioral questions to your own unique hiring situation, you will glean an abundance of candidate intel, extending the conversation beyond the resume. After the interview, you will better understand motivators and values, you will get a sense how the candidate solves problems and initiates new ideas, you will know whether they play well with others or work better solitarily, and you will understand how they influence and communicate with others.