

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Coping

Able to maintain a mature problem-solving attitude while dealing with interpersonal conflict, hazardous conditions, personal rejection, hostility, or time demands.

Probes

Tell me about a time when you had to cope with strict deadlines or time demands. Give me an example.

When have you had to cope with the anger or hostility of another person? Be specific.

Tell me about a high stress situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What happened?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate cope through a positive action or problem resolution? Was there a negative physical reaction or a negative expression of the stress?

Did the candidate respond in a problem-solving manner and with positive feelings? Was there a failure to use procedures, an absence of preparation, and/or a failure to notice an important change in conditions?

Did the candidate adapt his/her attitude to the situation and maintain a constructive approach to problem solving? Was there poor emotional adjustment and/or a display of negative feelings?

Tolerance of Ambiguity

Able to withhold actions or speech in the absence of important information; deal with unresolved situations, frequent change, delays, or unexpected events.

Probes

Describe a time in your life when you were proud of your ability to postpone your comments until you had all the facts necessary for a good response to a situation.

Sometimes it is necessary to work in unsettled or rapidly changing circumstances. When have you found yourself in this position? Tell me exactly what you did.

Sooner or later we all find ourselves in the position of having to live with an unresolved situation on the job. Tell me about a time when this happened to you.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate adapt to an unclear situation while seeking information to aid problem solving/adjustment? Was there frustration, ineffectiveness, emotional self-expression, and/or offensiveness?

Did the candidate use change productively, possibly seeing it as stimulating/challenging? Was there an emotionally draining sense of powerlessness and/or a lack of productivity?

Did the candidate make productive use of time, along with insight, patience, and/or understanding? Were there negative feelings, such as anger, hostility, blame or withdrawal, which limited the candidate's productivity?

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Decisiveness

Able to make decisions quickly on available information and take action; make commitments and not change decisions when challenged; deal with emergencies as necessary.

Probes

Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take speedy action.

Tell me about a situation when you had to stand up for a decision you made even though it was unpopular.

Describe a situation in which you had to take immediate action in a crisis involving human life or severe financial consequences.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate take quick, purposeful, and effective action? Was there a lack of timely action, inaction, or a panicky action?

Did the candidate show a willingness to speak out for a principle/person? Was there impulsiveness or poor judgement in speaking out?

Did the candidate take speedy action after scanning for important facts? Was there inaction or a quick/panicky action without thought behind it?

Spoken Communications

Able to clearly present information through the spoken word; influence or persuade others through oral presentation in positive or negative circumstances; listen well.

Probes

What types of experiences have you had in talking with customers or clients? Specifically, tell me about a time when you had to communicate under difficult circumstances.

Careful listening and effective communications go together. Tell me about a specific time when your skill in listening helped you communicate better.

Tell me about a time when your language and speaking skills really worked for you on the job. Feel free to use either a supervisory or non-supervisory example.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate talk helpfully, perhaps reflecting preparation, an understanding of the problem, attention to timing, and/or conflict management? Was there an expression of negative feelings, such as attack or withdrawal?

Did the candidate attend to the facts and feelings in a message, and respond in a way that related to the other person's needs/style? Were there errors in listening, perhaps paying little attention to the speaker?

Did the candidate express an idea clearly, perhaps involving careful choice of words, gestures, and/or stories? Was there an absence of preplanning, little choice of words, impulsiveness, and/or withdrawal?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Assertiveness

Able to maturely express one's feelings and opinions in spite of disagreement; accurately communicate to others regardless of their status or position.

Probes

Give me an example of a time when you had to be assertive in giving directions to others.

Some situations require us to express ideas/opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell me about a time when you were successful with this particular skill.

Describe a time when you communicated something unpleasant or difficult to say to your manager or work team. How did you assert yourself?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate give firm, clear direction, perhaps with concern for another's feelings? Was there an emotional reaction such as anger or anxiety?

Did the candidate communicate with clarity and directness, and without evidence of negative feelings? Was there evidence or expression of negative feelings such as aggression or withdrawal, which interfered with effective communication?

Did the candidate accurately and tactfully express a fact/opinion on a sensitive/important issue? Was there avoidance of an issue, passive aggression, and /or an aggressive/tactless presentation?

Energizing

Able to create positive energy (motivation) in both individuals and groups.

Probes

Give me a specific example of something you did which helped build enthusiasm in others.

Tell me about a time in which you used competition successfully as a means of encouraging others to try hard.

At work it is sometimes desirable to use recognition to build motivation in others. Describe a time in which you were able to use recognition to create positive energy in another person.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate use an energetic presentation and/or a plan for energizing others toward a particular objective? Was there discouragement and/or low enthusiasm on the candidate's part?

Did the candidate use a specific competitive technique to increase measurable performance results? Was there an absence of performance measurement, or a technique which had a trivial or negative impact on team spirit?

Did the candidate selectively use recognition in light of a particular person's/group's characteristics? Was there little use/acceptance of recognition as a way to reinforce desirable behavior?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Policy and Procedures

Able to relate to routine operations in a manner that is consistent with existing solutions to problems; conform to established policies and procedures; log work activities.

Probes

On some jobs it is necessary to act strictly in accordance with policy. Give me an example out of your background when you were expected to act in accordance with policy even when it was not convenient. What did you do?

Describe a time when you had to adopt a well-defined work routine. How long did the situation last? What was involved?

Select a job you have had and describe the paperwork you were required to complete. What specific things did you do to ensure your accuracy?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate follow policy because of commitment to it, even if a reason could be given for breaking it? Was there non-conformity to policy because of personal style, disrespect for those who made the policy, and/or revenge/dishonesty?

Did the candidate appreciate routine procedures and show commitment to use the routine to ensure/improve performance? Was there avoidance of a work routine, perhaps despite recognizing its potential merit?

Did the candidate show commitment to thoroughness/accuracy as both a personal and professional standard? Was there postponement/falsification/ avoidance of expected paperwork?

Alertness

Able to be attentive to all aspects of the environment while working; to monitor environment during routine activity.

Probes

Tell me about a specific experience you have had in which it was necessary for you to react quickly because of a change in the physical environment.

Give me an example of any time in the past when you were especially attentive to your environment while working. Feel free to showcase your skills in being alert while on the job.

Tell me about your experience in dealing with routine work. What kinds of problems did you have to overcome in order to concentrate on the details of the job?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate act quickly and properly, guided by preparation, anticipation, and alertness? Was there inattention, casualness, and/or overconfidence?

Did the candidate use a strategy for maintaining/heightening alertness? Was there a lack of preparation / alertness, perhaps leading to a mistake?

Did the candidate use a strategy to maintain attentiveness during routine work? Was there acceptance of diminished alertness, with little effort being made to remove/reduce it?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Analytical Problem Solving

Able to use a systematic approach in solving problems through analysis of problem and evaluation of alternate solutions; use logic, mathematics, or other problem solving tools in data analysis or in generating solutions.

Probes

Tell me about a time when you were systematic in identifying potential problems at work. Feel free to showcase you analytical skills.

Give me an example of any time when you used tools such as survey data, library research, or statistics as important contributors to the definition of a specific problem.

To what extent has your past work required you to be skilled in the analysis of technical reports or information? Pick any specific experience which would highlight your skills in this area and describe in detail

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate anticipate and identify a problem, then collect data and analyze it? Was there a lack of anticipation/preparation and/or use of a trial-and-error approach?

Did the candidate have a primary role in research design, formal data collection, and interpretation? Was there acceptance of questionable information or assumptions, or over-dependence on others?

Did the candidate conduct a close review of detailed technical information, requiring a professional education or training to understand? Was there a superficial/incomplete review of information, perhaps covering materials such as popular magazines?

Goal Setting

Able to define realistic, specific goals and objectives; to prioritize objectives.

Probes

Tell me about the system that you use for goal setting. To what extent does it involve using written objectives, paperwork, or forms? Describe a specific instance in which you defined your goals and objectives in writing.

What have been your experiences in defining long-range goals? Tell me what specific goal was set, how it was set, and how successful you were in its achievement.

Give me an example of a time when you used a systematic process to define your objectives. What type of system did you use? What payoff did you get from using the process?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate show commitment to using a goal setting system to solve problems or bring about change/achievement? Was there acquiescence to goals set by others, a resistance to goal setting, or setting only of daily goals?

Did the candidate set written goals for two or more years ahead, based on logical extensions of business cycles or future opportunities/problems? Was there setting of short range (daily/monthly) goals, or little experience in goal setting?

Did the candidate systematically use such things as fact finding, team involvement, potential-problem analysis, and/or analytical tools? Was there little initiative in fact finding, lip-service to objectives, and/or resistance to systematic goal setting?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Written Communication

Able to write clearly and effectively present ideas and to document activities; to read and interpret written information.

Probes

Give me an example, taken from your experiences in report writing, preparation of memos, or general correspondence which illustrates the extent of your written communication skills.

This job will require to spend a large amount of time writing. Tell me about your writing experiences that you think will contribute to your ability to do this job well.

How much reading of new information is required in your current job? How often do you have to expose yourself to new written communications? When did these skills cause you to be a superior performer?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate describe professional skills in writing, including independent development of lengthy/creative/research documents or important business/professional correspondence? Were there activities, such as coding or preparation of documents, with little discretion of the candidate's part?

Did the candidate demonstrate writing skill and time commitment, perhaps as evidenced by publication? Was there little skill or interest in writing?

Did the candidate show initiative/ commitment to reading in order to stay informed? Was the reading prompted by everyday needs for information or simple availability?

Commitment to Task

Able to start and persist with specific courses of action while exhibiting high motivation and a sense of urgency; willing to commit to long hours of work and make personal sacrifice in order to reach goals.

Probes

Tell me about a time in your background when you were a driving, highly motivated worker. Don't be too modest-give yourself due credit for getting the job done.

Tell me about a time at work when someone commented on your high level of task orientation.

We all have to make decisions on the job about the delicate balance between personal and work objectives. When do you feel you have had to make personal sacrifices in order to get the job done?

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate initiate an unusual level of effort and commitment? Was the example trivial, perhaps showing low motivation or a resistance to extra effort?

Did the candidate accomplish something unusual, requiring a significant level of commitment? Was the example trite, or a routine response to a situation, rather than effort initiated by the candidate?

Did the candidate sacrifice time/plans/energy for the sake of a work objective, without compromising values or dignity? Was there resistance/low effort to make a personal sacrifice to reach a work objective?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Interaction

Able to communicate with others in a warm and helpful manner while simultaneously building credibility and rapport.

Probes

Describe a time when you were able to be personally supportive and reassuring to a person who needed a friend.

Being skillful in dealing with other people on the job is an important factor in being productive. Describe a time when you were successful in dealing with another because you built a trusting and harmonious relationship.

Relating to another person goes beyond giving recognition and approval. Describe a time when you were helpful to another while simultaneously building a good relationship.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate emphasize fact finding, acceptance, confidentiality, support, warmth, and/or friendship? Was there little interest in/rejection of support/reassurance?

Did the candidate act/decide to reduce control and increase trust based on information about a person? Was there a misuse of trust and/or an automatic distrusting reaction?

Did the candidate make a time commitment and/or show understanding/genuine care for another person, even if that person's behavior/attitude could have made the effort unrewarding? Was there disrespect/insensitivity for another person's feelings?

Perceptivity

Able to interpret verbal and non-verbal behavior; to develop accurate perception and understanding of others' feelings, needs, values, and opinions; to be sensitive to and aware of personality differences and conflicts.

Probes

Tell me about a time during negotiations when your perceptiveness helped you to make sense out of another person's behavior.

Understanding people can be an important skill. At work, when has your analysis of another's motives and feelings paid off for you?

Tell me about a time which shows your skill in recognizing hidden interests or personality conflicts.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate recognize/act based on another person's behavior, perhaps referring to the match of non-verbals to verbal content? Were there snap judgements or stereotypes based on the other person's clothing or appearance?

Did the candidate use behavioral observation to assess motives and/or feelings? Was there use of stereotypes/labels to make quick judgement?

Did the candidate observe and reasonably interpret behavior, perhaps adapting one's own behavior to adjust to it? Were there stereotypes/blame/labeling based on assumptions about behavior, rather than behavioral observations?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Organization and Planning

Able to organize and schedule people or tasks; to develop realistic action plans while being sensitive to time constraints and resource availability.

Probes

Planning is often more than thinking, it is also doing. Tell me what you have done with such tools as flow charts, production schedules, and filing systems or anything else to help you plan.

Give me an example from your working history that demonstrates your ability to organize and maintain a system of records to facilitate your work.

Getting results at work often entails spelling out detailed action plans. Tell me about how you used realistic schedules and timetables to generate a plan leading to a specific goal.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate use a planning tool to make use of people/resources? Was there a failure to plan/organize or a dependence on another person to see that it was done?

Did the candidate initiate or show commitment to a systematic method for organization or record keeping? Was there ineffective record keeping, overconfidence in memory, and/or dependence on others?

Did the candidate formally define realistic and measurable objectives? Was there a trivial/near-term/general objective, skepticism about the value of having objectives, and/or dependence on others to set objectives?

Creativity

Able to develop unique and novel solutions to problems; use intuition and a new way of thinking to give birth to new ideas; to present information in an attention-getting and interesting manner.

Probes

Creative persons seem to offer fresh insights frequently and regularly. Give me an example of a time when one of your insights or innovations was particularly well-received by others.

Creativity often means stepping back from regimented ways of thinking. When have you been able to break out of a structured mind set and intuitively play with concepts and ideas?

New ideas may come from intuition; however, many ideas come from hard work and dedication. Tell me of an idea you originated through combined hard work and intuition.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate receive public recognition for innovation by an award, praise, and/or special comment? Was there awareness of the value of innovation, but with a trivial/impractical application?

Did the candidate use a special activity/stimulus/internal dialogue to change perspective in order to enhance creativity? Was there failure to change perspective/assume a new mindset?

Did the candidate work unusually long hours to use his/her vision/intuition to generate an idea/ product? Was there creative outcome which emerged without a time commitment or particular effort?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Versatility

Able to modify one's own behavioral style to respond to the needs of other while maintaining one's own objectives and sense of dignity.

Probes

Sooner or later we all have to deal with arrogant, dogmatic people. Tell me about a time when you were able to be flexible with this type of person.

Describe a time when you were able to adapt to a person from a background or culture that was different from yours.

Tell me about a time when you were able to make someone feel comfortable when dealing with a situation which had a lot of feelings involved in it. Describe a specific case.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate deal with another person's wants/needs while maintaining positive feelings and a service attitude? Was there little effort to adapt and/or regrets for adapting to another person?

Did the candidate have awareness of differences in interpersonal style/ values and respond to them by adjusting his/her behavior, without compromising integrity? Was there little willingness to adapt, perhaps with a judgmental approach toward others?

Did the candidate show understanding and helpfulness when dealing with another person's feelings? Was there little interest in dealing with another person's feelings?

Reading the System

Able to recognize and use information about organizational climate and key individuals to accomplish legitimate organizational goals; be aware of the importance of timing, politics, and group processes in managing change.

Probes

Unfortunately most organizations have some elements which impact on the ways in which things get done. Tell me about a time in your background in which you feel you worked within the system, handling a political situation effectively.

Different people have different motivators. When have you been successful in discovering a key person's motivation and using that knowledge to bring about an important change? Be specific.

The term "shrewd" suggests an ability to understand what really needs to be done to reach organizational objectives. Tell me how you "read the system" shrewdly to reach a goal.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate accurately assess timing/agendas/issues, and then effectively take or avoid action while working with stated policy and unstated rules of conduct? Was there underuse or misuse of politics to influence achievement of objectives?

Did the candidate cultivate/manage a channel of communication in order to move toward a work goal? Was there naivete and/or a very standard/trivial way to understand hidden agendas, communication channels, and/or the informal organization?

Did the candidate use an influence strategy for a legitimate organizational goal, based on preferences/issues/characteristics of individuals and/or corporate culture? Was there self-serving use of politics and/or denial that politics may guide productive change?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Team Building

Able to work with people in such a manner as to build high morale and group commitments to goals and objectives.

Probes

Building a team spirit to get results is often a difficult thing to do. Tell me about a time when you had your greatest success in building a team spirit. What specific results were accomplished by the team?

Goal congruence is the overlap between individual goals and group objectives. Tell me about a time when you created group commitment to goals by developing goal congruence.

There is a big difference between being committed to an individual or to a team. Tell me about a time when your commitment to a person was tested because of your commitment to the team. Explain what you did and why.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate create a common goal/vision, and/or use a feedback/ reward system, to coalesce a team? Was there an absence of team activity and/or use of pressure to achieve results?

Did the candidate purposefully link an individual/group goal to an organization objective? Was there little experience in goal setting or building goal commitment?

Did the candidate maintain the same standards for all persons on the team? Was there blatant favoritism for an individual over the team, perhaps for political reasons or with an excuse for rewarding to a well-liked person?

ESS Behavioral Based Interviewing Questions

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Able to take action in solving problems while exhibiting judgement and a realistic understanding of issues; able to use reason, even when dealing with emotional topics.

Probes

Solving problems requires more than good plans; it means taking action. Give me an example of a time when you were able to take meaningful action in solving a practical problem.

When we get emotionally involved in a problem situation, it is often very difficult to be objective. Tell me about a time when you were proud of your ability to be objective even though you were emotional about a problem situation.

Often, extensive job training and experience are required to get the best results in decision making. Describe, in detail, a situation in which you used your training and experience in making a decision which required sound judgement.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate take action based on a systematic approach, meaningful review of facts/issues/timing, and a willingness to commit to a solution? Was there impulsive action taken due to pressure instead of a practical analysis of what actions were desirable?

Did the candidate observe behavior, collect facts, and/or use analytical results to draw a conclusion? Were there feelings which interfered with observation, collection of facts, and/or interpretation of them?

Did the candidate review important/ available facts/feelings, then apply a principle learned in training? Was there little application of information learned in training to make a decision correctly?

Leadership

Able to influence the actions and opinions of others in a desired direction; to exhibit judgement in leading others to worthwhile objectives.

Probes

Give me an example of a time when you used facts and reason to persuade another person to take action. Be specific.

Individuals vary in their abilities to use power or persuasion to influence others. Give me an example of a time when you used either power or persuasion to guide another person to a worthwhile objective. Be specific.

Give me an example of how you have used your own personal qualities and appeal to lead others.

Interpretive Guides

Did the candidate make an organized presentation, making benefit statements, dealing with concerns, and/or asking for a decision? Was there little/superficial attempt to influence?

Did the candidate base his/her use of either power or persuasion on the requirements of the situation? Was there use of either power or persuasion to an extreme?

Did the candidate make a presentation with an emphasis on feelings rather than facts, perhaps using metaphors/examples/stories to express the feeling? Was there little skill in using another person's emotions to influence his/her decision?

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