Fire Career Prep Mentorship Program
Behavioral Questions Fact Sheet

"A person finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word"

Ancient Proverb.

Behavioral questions are used by interviewers as a means of learning the candidates previous decision-making processes and resultant outcomes in specific scenarios. This, they believe provides an indication of likely future action. In essence **past behavior predicts future actions.** There are some limitations to this theory as of course humans are dynamic and grow and change as time goes by. The way your responded four years ago may be drastically different from the way you respond today.

The questions are typically phrased "Tell us of a time – insert behavior".

The key to answering these questions is to not take the question too literally and instead use this as an opportunity to highlight your suitability as a candidate. You do this by ensuring you mention specific qualities or behaviors.

There are many qualities / behaviors that you could choose to highlight. Providing a quality answer requires you to practice your answers and your stories (primarily your stories). With that said here is a brief list of the top ten qualities / behaviors we commonly look for in a quality answer to behavioral questions. (In no particular order).

1. **Ownership**
2. **Integrity**
3. **Leadership / Initiative**
4. **Communication / Interpersonal skills / De-escalation skills**
5. **Accountability**
6. **Teachability / Humility**
7. **Selflessness / Teamwork**
8. **Confidence**
9. **Safety advocacy**
10. **Self-awareness**

Using the star-L method: The star method is a commonly used and accepted method for answering behavioral interview questions. Our method slightly adapted to allow you to follow one of our "rules for great answers" "Demonstrate your learning". To accomplish this, we add the letter L to the existing star method which represents "Learning". You're now probably ready to hear how it actually works. The star-L method is as follow:

- Situation – Where were you working, when, what was your role?
- Task – What were you there to do? What had you been ordered to do?
- Action – What did you or your team do? What did other players in the story do?
- Result – What happened after you had carried out your actions? What would you do differently now?
- Learning – What did you learn from the whole scenario? How did this experience change you and the way you work?

Before we begin practicing, I want you to think of your answer as a cup being filled with liquid. The STAR-L method makes up the structure, the cup. While your ability to highlight your, skills, experience, and background in a complimentary way is the liquid that fills the cup.

Below im going to demonstrate two answers both using the star-L method one candidate stops talking after offering the interview panel an empty cup (which is still better than many) while the other offers the interview panel a full cup.

Again understand that a story that only covers the star-L subject matter is incredibly limited in terms of a high scoring answer what is important for you to do is fill that cup, that structure with qualities and behaviors that sell you in the absolute best light possible to ensure you get the maximum marks for your answer.

For example: Question – "Tell me about a time you have broken a rule?"

Answer 1: "I was working for abc building on a multistory residential complex as a window installer in 2009. It was my first large scale development project and I was working with several different supervisors on site. One afternoon as we were eating lunch I was asked to retrieve something from a scaffold and bring it inside. I knew that the rule was if I was going to be on the scaffold I had to be in my harness and tied off. As I went to equip my harness the supervisor said "don't worry about that just go grab it" I wanted to make a good impression and so I obliged. I knew I should have put it on anyway but I didn't and when I returned inside our boss was there and not pleased that I had been out there without the appropriate PPE. We had a conversation about why it is important and I understood that it wasn't acceptable even if I was told not to.

This story covers every element of the star-L method however it is not a high scoring answer. Compare it to this answer:

Answer 2: "It was 2009 I was working for abc building on a multistory residential complex as a window installer. It was my first large scale development project and I was working with several different supervisors on site. One afternoon as we were eating lunch, I was asked to retrieve something from a scaffold and bring it inside. As part of my fall protection training, I knew that for me to be out on the scaffolding required me to wear a harness and be tied off. As I went to equip this harness one of my supervisors told me "don't worry about that just go quickly". Being a junior guy, I was eager to please my supervisor and crew so against my better judgement and the training I had received I obliged this request and quickly retrieved the item. After I returned from the scaffold with

the item I saw that our boss had joined the group, He asked me "were you just out on the scaffold?"

Integrity is important to me so I didn't make any excuses and admitted that I had been out there without my harness and apologized for not following our safety protocols. I felt like I had let myself, my boss, and my team down. My boss explained that the safety protocols are the utmost importance and should not ever be ignored. I took full ownership of the mistake and continued my work with a positive attitude despite feeling disheartened.

What I learned from this experience was that ultimately, I have to answer to myself and my integrity should come first in work scenarios especially as they pertain to safety. I also learned the value of humility and not making excuses in the work place, taking ownership for my mistakes and have been sure to never repeat such errors of judgement. Since that time I have become a safety advocate in my organization I always ensure that my team and I always wear our safety equipment. That is a time a broke a rule."

Compare answer 1 and answer 2. As an exercise see if you can highlight the specific moments answer 2 addresses each of the star methods categories as you see in answer 1. Additionally, I would like you to highlight each time you see the subject refer to themselves in a positive light.

The purpose of this exercise is to help you understand the uses and limitations of the star-L method without substance (the cup without its content). This question is chosen specifically because it leads us into our next discussion point.

Negative questions:

Some questions are designed to fool you into casting yourself in a negative light (we call this sewering yourself). The above is a prime example. By asking a time you had broken a rule they are banking on you eliminating yourself from the hiring process by choosing the most extreme example you can think of and highlighting your negative behaviors in the scenario. This is exactly what happens to the unprepared candidate. Other examples of negative questions are:

- Tell us of a time you made a mistake?
- Tell us about a time you failed to achieve a goal?
- Tell me about a time you had a conflict with a supervisor or coworker?
- Can you name a time you let your team down?
- Tell us a time you were dishonest?
- Tell us about the worst employer you've ever had?

These examples are all designed to trick you into hyper focusing on the negative elements and emotions you exhibited throughout the story you select. The key to answering these questions is to understand the question behind the question. In this case the question is asking "when you make a mistake, what do you do?"

Multi stage questions:

Be aware of Multi stage questions, these are questions that have more than one part to them and therefore require more than one answer. It is important that you pay attention to multistage questions and clarify the parts of them with the interviewer(s) if necessary. Examples of multistage questions are below marked with an *. When answering them ensure you answer each stage individually for example:

Question: Give me an example of a time when you had to handle multiple responsibilities at once. How did you prioritize your time? *

Answer: "When I worked in (blank) job or role I was responsible for (A,B,C)" conclude that answer then move on to answer the second part of the question. "I prioritized my time using (blank) methods.

The importance of answering the full question cannot be overstated as some panels or interviewers will not consider a question answered until all parts of the question are answered resulting in you receiving no score for the answer. Which is why our next two rules are "Answer all parts of every question", "if you forget, ask the question again" Its important to remember that if you forget part of or the whole of a question it is acceptable to ask this shows competence and confidence. I have never met or heard of a panel, recruitment officer, or interviewer that has doxed someone for asking for the question to be repeated.

Time for you to practice:

Below are 45 commonly used behavioural questions for you to practice with. Select as many as you would like and go through the same exercise we did earlier.

- Read the question
- Think about which story from your experience you would like to use to answer the question.
- Outline the anchor points to the question using the star-L method that will make your cup. Then you can write a subpar (cup only) question.
- Next you're going to identify what you would include to start adding liquid to the cup. What skills, experience, personality traits, or behaviours are you going to highlight to sell yourself as a high-quality candidate.
- Once you have identified these attributes, rewrite the story using the star-L structure plus the skills, experience, personality traits, or behaviours you selected. This should give you a high scoring well read story about a past behaviour that sells you in a positive light.
- Then you can repeat this process as many times as you wish

Examples of Behavioral Questions:

1. Tell me about a goal you set and achieved and how you were able to reach it.
2. Tell me about the last time your workday ended before you were able to get everything done.
3. Give me an example of a time you had to prioritize certain tasks or projects over others.
4. Give me an example of a time when you had to handle multiple responsibilities at once. How did you prioritize your time? *
5. Tell me about the last time you handle a long-term project. How did you keep the project on track? *
6. Can you share about a time you had to be flexible or adaptable?
7. Tell me about a time when you had to be creative to solve a problem?
8. Tell us about a time you had to learn quickly? How did you adapt? *
9. Tell me about a time you made a difficult decision?
10. Tell us about how you work under pressure?
11. Tell me about a time when you handled a challenging situation?
12. Tell me about a time you have broken a rule?
13. Tell us of a time you let your team down?
14. Give me an example of a time you made a decision that was unpopular and explain how you handled implementing it.*
15. Tell me about a goal you failed to achieve a goal?
16. Tell us about a time you felt you went above and beyond.
17. Tell me about a time when you handled a challenging situation.
18. Tell me about a time when you made a mistake? What did you do to correct it? *
19. Tell us of a time in your life when you were the most stressed you've ever been? and what you did to help manage your stress? *
20. Tell us about a time when you had to say "no"?
21. Tell us of a time you were physically exhausted?
22. Give us an example of a time you were in charge of a team?
23. Tell us of a time you felt capable of being the leader but was not selected to do so?
24. Give us an example of a time you set a goal and felt like giving up?
25. Give me an example of a time when you persuaded someone? How'd you do it and why? *
26. Talk about a time when you've had to take charge in a situation?

27. Tell me about a time when you had to explain a complex topic to people with less subject knowledge. How did you make sure everyone could understand you? *

28. Tell me about a time you had to build rapport with a coworker or client whose personality was different than yours?

29. What type of people do you struggle to get along with?

30. Tell us of a time you have been honest?

31. Tell me about a time when you collaborated with others who were different than you?

32. Tell us about the best presentation you've given. Why was it good?*

33. Tell me about a time when you felt like a good leader.

34. Can you give me an example of how you've contributed to the culture of previous teams, companies or groups?

35. Share an example of how you were able to motivate a coworker, your peers or your team?

36. Tell me about a time you disagreed with a supervisor?

37. Tell me about a time you had to stand up for your beliefs?

38. Tell us about a time when you disagreed with your manager's leadership style or team culture?

39. Tell me about a time when you were in conflict with a peer? and how the situation was resolved? *

40. Tell me about a time you wish you'd handled a situation with a coworker differently?

41. Tell us of a time you worked with a team? What was your role? How did it affect the team? *

42. Tell us a time in your life you were the most stressed you've ever been? How did you deal with it?*

43. Tell us about a time you you've had to make a decision quickly?

44. Give us an example of a time you've worked independently to complete a task?

45. Tell us about a time a procedure or policy changed at work and if you agreed with it or not? And why?*