

# TARGETED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Choose the most important attributes that are required to be effective in the job for which you are interviewing. Gather questions from each of the selected competencies to create your list of interview questions.

Within each competency, sample questions are organized by the following:

1. **Behavioral.** An interview technique that focuses on a candidate's past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities by asking the candidate to provide specific examples of when he or she has demonstrated certain behaviors or skills as a means of predicting future behavior and performance.
2. **Situational.** An interview technique that gives the interviewee a hypothetical scenario and focuses on a candidate's past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities by asking the candidate to provide specific examples of how the candidate would respond given the situation described.

## COMPETENCIES/ATTRIBUTES

### Communication

#### Behavioral

- Give some examples of how and when you were the spokesperson for your current (or most recent) company.
- Give an example of how you carefully considered your audience prior to communicating with them. What factors influenced your communication?
- Describe a time you used your communications skills to negotiate with an angry person.
- Have you ever given a presentation to a group? How did you prepare for it? What would you do differently?
- Describe a time when you were able to overcome a communications barrier(s).
- Tell me about a time when effective listening skills helped you in a problematic situation.
- Tell me about a time when you thought someone wasn't listening to you. What did you do?
- Recount an occasion when you were greeted with a greeting that was not normal for you. How'd you respond?

#### Situational

- Suppose two managers have difficulty communicating with each other, but you understand both. Would you try to help the two understand each other better? If so, how?
- Two members of a team do great work, but they do not work well together. What are some of the key ways to get them to work together better?

#### General

- Management requires both good writing and verbal skills for effective communication. When it comes to giving information to employees that can be done either way, do you prefer to write an e-mail or memo or talk to the employee? Why?
- How well do you communicate with others? What communication techniques do you use?
- When do you think it is best to communicate in writing? When do you communicate face-to-face?

- In terms of communication (face-to-face, phone, e-mail, instant messaging, texting), when might you use each?

## Flexibility

### Behavioral

- Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline and you were interrupted and did not make the deadline. How did you respond?
- Give an example of a time when you had to quickly change project priorities. How did you do it?
- Recount a time when you accommodated someone beyond your comfort level, though you didn't have to.

### Situational

- Suppose you are in a situation in which deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly. How would you handle it?
- Your shift is 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. At 4 p.m. the boss asks for volunteers to work until 8 p.m. How do you usually respond?
- It's 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. Your supervisor gives you an assignment that needs to be finished by 8:00 Monday morning. You have already made plans to be away the entire weekend. What would you do?
- You work an eight-hour day. You have eight tasks of equal measure that are due that day. You have a company party for two hours that day. What do you do?

### General

- People react differently when job demands are constantly changing. How do you react to this?
- How important is it to be flexible?

## Problem-solving/Analysis

### Behavioral

- Describe for me a decision you made that would normally have been made by your supervisor. What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you needed to use the principles of logic to solve a problem.
- Have you ever solved a problem that others around you could not solve? Tell me about it.
- What was one of the toughest problems you ever solved? What process did you go through to solve it?
- Tell me about a time when you had a work problem and didn't know what to do.
- Tell me about a time when you solved one problem but created others.
- Tell me about a time when a work problem was more than it at first appeared to be.
- How have you approached solving a problem that initially seemed insurmountable?
- What have you done when faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give me an example.
- How do you analyze different options to determine which is the best alternative?
- Describe for me how your prior positions required you to be proficient in the analysis of technical reports.
- Give an example of when you used analytical techniques to design solutions to solve problems.

## Situational

- Assume math is not your strength. You need to do some statistical analysis regarding your group's performance to present to other departments. What do you do?

## General

- Do people ever come to you for help in solving problems? Why? Give me an example of when this happened.

Solve for x.  $4x - 12 = 48$ .

## Technical Capacity

### Behavioral

- The last time that you experienced a technical problem during your workday, to whom did you go for help? Why did you choose this person?
- Tell me about a time when you used your technical knowledge to solve a problem that appeared to be unsolvable.
- Describe a technical report that you had to complete. What did the report entail? What was the purpose? Who was the audience?
- Describe a time when you had to share data electronically.

### Situational

- You need to merge a document from Excel to Word. Can it be done?
- An executive needs money sent to a certain account (say, to buy tickets for a prospective client). Only you have the requisite information and authority. What do you look for in the URL to ensure security with the site?
- An employee e-mails a Word presentation to you. How would you get that presentation to an overhead PowerPoint projection?
- Say a weather emergency keeps employees from going to the office, but a meeting has to happen. How would you assemble meeting participants?
- Several team members in several different states need to collaborate. What are the best steps to accomplish that? How would you facilitate?

### General

- Describe the types of network security features you have implemented or maintained in the past.
- How would you describe your skills in Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access (relevant software used in the job)? Beginner, intermediate or advanced?
- Describe your previous experience with travel planning and reservations.
- What experience do you have scheduling meetings and conferences and ordering food and materials for meetings?
- How many words per minute can you type?
- What do you believe is your most honed skill?

- In your opinion, how does managing a staff of technical workers differ from managing other kinds of workers?
- What characteristics do you feel are necessary for success as a technical support worker?
- What support, either administrative or technical assistance, did you receive in your previous positions?
- Describe the ideal technical support you would need to be most effective as [job title].
- How can technology help this position function?

## Thoroughness

### Behavioral

- What means have you used to focus on detail and to keep from making mistakes?
- When there's a decision for a new critical process, what means do you use to communicate step-by-step processes to ensure other people understand and will complete the process correctly?
- Tell me the steps you take to monitor the quality of your work in your current job.
- How do you decide when something is "good enough" or when it needs to be as close as possible to perfection? When have you had to make this determination? Explain.
- Describe a time when you failed to satisfy a client or customer due to some minor neglect. What did you do to correct it?

### Situational

- After repairing some drywall, you notice you've left a small amount of debris where you did the work. What do you do?

### General

- Tell me how the quality of your work affects others around you. Give me an example.
- Describe "thoroughness."

## Ethical Practices

### Behavioral

- Describe a time when you came across questionable business practices. How did you handle the situation?
- Have you ever faced a significant ethical problem at work? How did you handle it?
- Describe a time when you made a mistake at work. How did you deal with this situation, and what was the outcome?
- Have you worked in a situation in which an employee, vendor or supplier had a conflict of interest? How did you handle this?
- Describe a time when you had an opportunity to personally profit from your employer's product.

### Situational

- You have found a co-worker's or client's belongings in the main corridor (communal space). Describe how you would take care of the situation.
- Suppose your supervisor asked you to get information for him or her that you knew was confidential and that he or she should not have access to. What would you do?

- If you observed a co-worker making inappropriate sexual or racial remarks to another employee, and it was obvious to you that the situation was creating an uncomfortable environment, what would you do?
- Several of the clients this position services use direct mail marketing. Suppose that you just received a supply of the final conference brochures that you developed, proofed and sent to the printer for one of these clients. The deadline for mailing the 10,000 brochures is tomorrow. You notice that there is an error in the date of one of the conference sessions. What would you do?
- As our president/CEO, how would you proceed if the board of directors adopted a policy or program that you felt was inconsistent with the goals and mission of our company?
- What would you do if you and others discovered your immediate supervisor was sexually harassing other employees?

#### General

- Define professional behavior or conduct appropriate in the workplace.
- Explain the phrase "work ethic," and describe yours.
- Are there any types of marketing that you consider unethical?
- How important is ethics in modern business?

### Change Agent

#### Behavioral

- Have you ever had to champion an unpopular change? What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
- Have you ever had to persuade a peer or superior to accept an idea that you knew he or she would not like? Tell me about the resistance you met and how you overcame it.
- Have you ever had to persuade a group to accept a proposal or idea? How did you go about doing it? What was the result, and how did you feel about it?
- Have you ever had to persuade an executive (or other superior) to accept a proposal or idea? How did you go about doing it? What was the result, and how did you feel about it?
- Describe an occasion when you recommended a change to procedure. What did you learn from that experience? How did you apply that learning in other situations?
- Tell me about a time when significant changes took place in your job. What did you do to adjust to the change(s)?

#### Situational

- The organization is removing an unprofitable division. How do you address the relevant stakeholders?
- There's an unexpected change in state law that affects a key division in your company. Describe your most likely response.

#### General

- If you are hired for this position and are still with [Company Name] five years from now, how do you think the organization will be different?
- What if any changes do you feel [Company Name] would benefit from within the next three years to improve competitiveness?

## Diversity and Inclusion

### Behavioral

- What has been the most challenging aspect of being in a diverse working environment? What steps have you taken to meet this challenge?
- Tell me about a time you had to alter your work style to meet a diversity need or challenge.
- How have you handled a situation when a colleague was not accepting of diversity of others?
- What strategies have you used to address diversity challenges? What were the positives and negatives?
- Describe a time when you included someone in your team or on a project because you felt he or she would bring a different perspective.

### Situational

- [Provide the company's mission statement with value on diversity to the interviewee.] How has your experience and background prepared you to be effective in this environment with this diversity value or initiative?
- What kind of leadership efforts would you make to ensure a commitment to the diversity initiative or value?
- Assume you are in a situation where you have to deal with a person very different from yourself, and you are finding it difficult. What would you do?
- A new co-worker speaks another language. Do you try to learn small talk in that language or discourage the potential confusion caused by the use of different languages in the workplace

### General

- What kinds of experiences have you had working with others with backgrounds different from your own?
- What does it mean to have a commitment to diversity, and how would you develop and apply your commitment at this company?
- What was or is the diversity value at your current or former employer? What impact did you make on this value?
- What efforts have you made or been involved with to foster diversity competence and understanding?
- What have you done to further your knowledge about diversity? Have you included diversity in your professional development? How have you demonstrated what you have learned?
- When in doubt about what a co-worker from another culture may be trying to communicate, is it okay to ask the co-worker to repeat himself or herself?
- What does "implicit bias" mean to you?

## Decision-making

### Behavioral

- What are some of the most important steps you've used in making business-related decisions?
- Give a specific example of a decision you made that was not effective. Why do you think it was not effective, and what did you do when this realization was made?
- Describe a time when you had to make a very important and difficult decision that affected everyone in your department.

- Recount a time when you were not the authority but had to make a decision about the team's next step(s).

### Situational

- How would you react if the following situation should occur: A co-worker or customer suddenly collapses on the floor. After a few minutes, a large crowd, speaking loudly and making demands, gathers around.
- You have a critical decision to make for your department, and all alternatives will likely be unpopular with your staff. What input do you gather before deciding? What factors do you take into consideration?
- What would you do if your assistant needed a computer monitor immediately? His co-worker was on vacation for three weeks and had a compatible unused monitor at his desk, and the purchase order process would take the assistant's new monitor up to three weeks to be delivered.

### General

- What methods do you use to make decisions? When do you find it most difficult to make a decision?
- Managers need good information to be able to make good decisions. Do you tend to gather information up to a deadline to make a better-informed decision or gather just enough information to make a good decision quickly?

## Initiative

### Behavioral

- Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when, unsolicited, you suggested a better way to perform a process?
- Tell me about a career goal that you have accomplished and why that was important to you.
- Could you share with us a recent accomplishment you are most proud of?
- Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities. What was the task? Why did you perceive it to be outside your responsibilities? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you kept from getting bored when dealing with routine tasks.
- What was the most creative thing you did in your last job?
- Give me an example of a time you were able to take the lead in changing a policy for your department and for the organization.

### Situational

- When you complete a task early, what do you do with your "extra" time?
- You're given an assignment to create "two or three" proposals. Assuming you have more than enough time and resources, how many proposals do you actually create? Why?
- The company newsletter editor asks for input from any willing department, but employees think that contributors to the newsletter "talk too much." Do you contribute anyway?
- Company policy provides tuition assistance. Should HR employees take advantage of that benefit?

### General

- When were you able to demonstrate initiative?

## Leading Others

### Behavioral

- Give me an example of a time when you needed to help other employees learn a new skill set. What did you do?
- Have you ever been in a position in which you had to lead a group of peers? How did you handle it? Tell me about problems you had and how you handled them.
- Have you ever managed a situation in which the people or units reporting to you were in different locations? Tell me how this worked.
- Tell me about your experience working with a board of directors. What approach and philosophy did you follow in working with boards?
- Tell me about a time when you organized, managed and motivated others on a complex task from beginning to end.
- Give me an example of how you have motivated your employees.

### Situational

- A new policy is to be implemented organization wide. You do not agree with this new policy. How do you discuss this policy with your staff?
- A subordinate regularly questions your authority. What do you do?
- The board of directors elects not to reward bonuses this year and tasks you with communicating the board's decision to staff. How do you do this?

### General

- Describe an ideal supervisor or manager.
- Tell us about your management style—people, teamwork and direction.
- What is the largest number of employees you have supervised, and what were their job functions?
- Tell me about your experience in leading and managing an organization similar to ours.
- Tell me about your experiences with staff development.
- What is your own philosophy of management?
- What do you do to develop employees you manage?
- Do you find it more natural to point out what's wrong so employees can accomplish tasks competently or to praise employees for their work and then later point out what may need correcting?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to team cohesiveness?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to unifying a department, division, plant or so forth?
- What do you think are the most valuable traits in a good leader?

## Personal Effectiveness/Credibility

### Behavioral

- What strengths did you rely on in your last position to make you successful in your work?
- Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome. What would you change (or will you change) when faced with a similar situation?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult boss, co-worker or customer. How did you handle the situation?

- Give an example of how you stay organized when juggling multiple tasks.
- Tell of a time you had to defend your actions.

#### Situational

- What do you do when you know you are right and your boss disagrees with you?

#### General

- How do you encourage people not under your authority to do work on your project?
- How would you describe your abilities as a business developer? As a business maintainer?
- How would your co-workers describe your work style or habits?
- Who should be responsible for monitoring and managing employee performance?

### Results Driven

#### Behavioral

- Tell me about your current or most recent position and how you helped the organization accomplish its goals and mission.
- How have you reacted when you found yourself stalled in an inefficient process?
- Tell me about a time when you inherited a process that wasn't working and you had limited time to fix it.

#### Situational

- The project is brought to a lull (or worse, a halt) due to a co-worker's lack of productivity. What are your next steps?

#### General

- Tell me about a position you have held in which part of your pay was based on your own performance or results.
- Which is more desirable to you: A business that is run in an efficient business-like manner or a business that is run in a personal and friendly way?
- Based on what you have read and heard, what ideas do you have about continuing and increasing the success of this company?
- How do you procure needed resources outside your direct control?
- When you design a process to get something done, how do you establish the steps?
- What are some of the most effective ways you use to keep tasks on track?
- How would you rate yourself as a closer when you're doing a sales presentation?
- Did you have assigned goals, objectives, quotas or targets? What were they, and did you meet them?
- How were your incentives structured in your last job?
- What were your responsibilities from the commencement to the end of the sales cycle?

### Learning Orientation

#### Behavioral

- Describe a time when you took a new job that required a much different set of skills from what you had. How did you go about acquiring the needed skills?
- Have you had an occasion when a prior strength actually turned out to be a weakness in another setting? How did you cope?
- Throughout your career have you learned more about your profession through course work or through on-the-job experience? Explain.
- What area of your last job was most challenging for you? Why was this specific part of the position difficult? Is this still challenging? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time when you volunteered for an assignment to expand your knowledge and skills.
- Tell of a time when you had to educate yourself about a topic to make a presentation.

#### Situational

- The company announces a reimbursement program for any course taken that will improve your performance in your current position. Do you take advantage of it? Why or why not?
- A new co-worker speaks another language. Do you try to learn small talk in that language or discourage the potential confusion caused by the use of different languages in the workplace?

#### General

- Tell me about the one person who has influenced you the most during your career. Was he or she a manager or mentor? What did you learn from him or her? Why do you think you learned so much from that person?
- What is more important to your profession—experience or continued education?
- How do you stay informed of current ideas on management and on the [industry/field]?
- Under what kinds of conditions do you learn best?
- In what areas would you like to develop further? What are your plans to do that?
- What are your career path interests?
- Should employees seek to improve their knowledge and skill base? Why? Why not?
- What was the best training program in which you have participated?
- What are your major professional reading sources?
- What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?
- Careers grow and develop just as people do. Where do you see your career now? Why? What are you doing to sustain it?
- What's the most valuable thing you've learned in the past year? Why?
- Do you feel you are knowledgeable about current industry-related legislation or trends? Why or why not?
- What was the last work-related educational seminar or class you attended? Why did you attend this course? How have you transferred the knowledge gained in the course to your work?
- Do you have aspirations to earn advanced degree(s)?

### Collaboration and Interpersonal Skills

#### Behavioral

- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a difficult time you have had dealing with an employee or customer. Why was it difficult? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?

- Describe a time when you were instrumental in creating or improving a good relationship with another department within your company.
- Recall an occasion when you had to work with people from different divisions to accomplish a single goal.
- Recount an occasion when you were able to connect individuals from different backgrounds or cultures in a unified organizational effort.

### Situational

- You are a committee member, and you disagree with a point or decision. How do you respond?
- If someone asked you for assistance with a matter that is outside the parameters of your job description, what would you do?
- If you had a problem with a team member's lack of contribution to a project, what would you do?
- There's a deadline to be met. The team members have an excellent grasp of their positions, but one member is absent from work, and no one can do her job well. What would you do?

### General

- What would your last boss say about how you collaborate with others?
- What do you think of your last boss?
- Describe how you like to be managed.
- Describe the best relationship you've had with a previous boss.
- If I asked your previous or current co-workers about you, what would they say?
- Tell me what type of relationship exists and *should* exist between your current department and the department it works most closely with.
- Each boss is a little different. My management philosophy or style is \_\_\_\_\_. In what way(s) do you think that your work style would complement mine [or other relevant person's work style]?
- Describe what you foresee to be as challenges or adjustments for us in this new role.
- In terms of communication (face-to-face, phone, e-mail, instant messaging, texting), which is your preference for collaboration? Why?

## Customer/Client Focus

### Behavioral

- Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to give great service to a customer.
- Tell me about a time when you asked for feedback on your customer service skills from your manager or co-worker and then used that response to improve your work.
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult guest- or client-relations problem. What was the outcome? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you knew that your customer might not get what he or she needed on time. How did you handle this?
- Tell me about a time when you had to say "no" to a customer because his or her request was against company policy.
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble working with a difficult or demanding customer. How did you handle this?
- Tell me about a situation in which you "lost it" or did not do your best with a customer. What did you do about this?
- Describe a time when you exceeded a customer's expectations.

- Describe a time when you lost a customer. What would you do differently?
- Share an example of a time when you developed rapport with a customer. What strategies did you use? How did you transfer the use of those strategies to other customers?

### Situational

- "Yes" is the word clients, customers and guests like to hear. However, if you had to say "no," how would you do it?
- A customer's purchase is not what was promised. Do you explain to the customer why that happened?

### General

- What do you find is the most difficult part about providing customer service? What is the best part?
- Describe a process or system that you improved so customers would be better served.
- When are policy exceptions to customers warranted? Not warranted?
- How do you go about deciding what strategy to employ when dealing with a difficult customer?
- We all have customers or clients. Who are your clients, and how do you identify them?
- What have you done to improve relations with your customers?
- How would you define guest or client satisfaction?
- What does the term "customer" mean to you?
- What does the phrase "servicing the sale" mean to you?
- Describe a time when someone failed to provide satisfactory service to you. How could that person have improved his or her performance in that particular situation?
- Give an example of one thing that is important in building repeat-customer business.
- What types of behaviors do you find most annoying or frustrating in a client or customer? How do you handle those behaviors?
- What specific process do you go through when a client or guest is dissatisfied?
- How do you think your clients, customers or guests would describe you and your work?
- Have you ever contacted a customer with the sole purpose of seeking feedback about a product or service you delivered? What did you learn? What did you change?

## Teamwork Orientation

### Behavioral

- Tell me about a time when a team project failed.
- Tell me about a time when you needed to work as part of a team to satisfy a client or resolve an issue.
- Tell me about a time you worked on a cross-functional team. Were there different challenges compared to a departmental-task team?
- When groups work together, conflict often erupts. Tell me about a time that conflict occurred in one of your workgroups and what you did about it.
- Tell me about a time you pitched in to help a team member finish a project even though it "wasn't your job." What was the result?
- Tell me about a situation in which political power plays affected team dynamics. How did you or the team overcome this situation, and how could the situation have been avoided?
- Tell me about a time when you were a part of a great team. What was your part in making the team effective?
- Tell me the role you play within workgroups and why.

- Tell me about the most effective contribution you have made as part of a task group or special project team.
- Have you ever worked on a virtual team? If so, tell me about this experience. What were the team dynamics? Was the team successful? If not, what do you perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of this type of team? What would you do differently? How would you suggest creating team cohesiveness in a virtual setting?

#### Situational

- The project is brought to a lull (or worse, a halt) due to a co-worker's lack of productivity. What are your next steps?
- You're in a group where individual performance is highly rewarded and regarded. One teammate is not as productive as the rest. You could help him and reduce your own productivity or not help, and the team suffers. How do you handle this?

#### General

- What do you think are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment? How do you handle it?
- If I asked several of your co-workers about your greatest strength as a team member, what would they tell me?
- What do you think makes a team of people work well together? What makes them not work well together?
- How would people you work with describe you?
- What is essential for a team to be successful?
- Who is the most valuable "player" on any team?

## Stress Management/Composure

#### Behavioral

- Tell me about a work "nightmare" you were involved in. How did you approach the situation, and what was the outcome?
- Have you ever been caught unaware by a problem or obstacle that you had not foreseen? What happened?

#### Situational

- You are angry about an unfair decision. How do you react?
- Your boss is vexed by a recurring misconception about your team or a process. Do you respond? How?

#### General

- Describe what you would classify as a "crisis."
- How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress?
- What do you do when others resist or reject your ideas or actions?
- How would your past employers describe your response to hectic or stressful situations?
- What kinds of events cause you stress on the job?