Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions:

“What is something you’ve done recently about which you feel particularly proud? Why?”

This example can come both from education and work experiences. Pick an accomplishment that displayed a skill and competency related to the interviewing position. Are you thinking about a sales position? People skills and excellent communication abilities would be good, as would any major sale you made in a job. Looking at accounting? Perhaps a project you’ve worked on – real or hypothetical – that involved solving complex accounting questions would be relevant. Going into counseling? Perhaps your time as a Resident Assistant when you mediated what could have been a major conflict which instead ended with an amicable resolution would be a good thing to mention. Just make sure you set up the situation, discuss the skill used to resolve it and the result.

“Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem or overcome an obstacle. What did you do and what was the outcome?”

In the end, most behavioral interview questions end up looking something like this. You have all the hallmarks in the request for a specific example of a problem, action and solution. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, pick an example relevant to the position, identify the problem, present your approach and then describe the successful outcome. If you know the new job will involve heavy teamwork, discuss a group project that wasn’t going well or a group task at work. If it is an individual position, then talk about something where you had to complete a task that was difficult.

Examples could be research projects where people did not respond to surveys or requests for information causing delays, group projects where some members were not completing their assigned tasks affecting everyone, or a customer or client complaint about services or products that you addressed and solved. Obviously, there can be many other examples, but these three are good general situations with which you most likely have had experience with.

“Think of a day when you had many things to do and describe how you scheduled your time.”

This is an example of a question that is looking for specific skills and abilities. The interviewer is trying to discover your time management and multitasking skills. Make sure you really answer the question, providing details. Even if you didn’t mention these skills as your primary strengths, talking about your excellent communication abilities again probably isn’t going to be that helpful. Sometimes employers will ask you about a situation involving a skill you haven’t mentioned to see if it is something you possess. Answer with confidence and try to anticipate where the interviewer is going with a line of questioning.
“Have you ever had a conflict with an employee or supervisor? What was the outcome?”

Some of the most difficult questions to answer are ones involving conflict with management. The key is to fairly describe the situation without being overly critical of your superiors. It is likely that you were in the right during the conflict, but what an interviewer will see if you go off about the inadequacies of a job or supervisor is someone playing the blame game and perhaps not owning up to his/her own part in the conflict. Be honest, recognize the possible faults of both sides, and describe the compromise that allowed the relationship to continue.

Avoid picking something as an example which permanently ended the relationship as there is no real successful outcome there. Even when you feel you were not at fault, try to propose ways in which you could have handled things differently to provide a better outcome. The best story is one you can follow up with a brief second example where you actually put those new skills into practice.

“When working in a team, what role do you usually take and why?”

You can expect to get some questions that will address your leadership style and experience. It is okay to say that you typically take the role of the worker managing smaller tasks and not the overall lead. Describe your leadership style here. Are you someone who likes to take charge and give orders or lead by example and handle their own tasks with excellence? Both could be valuable depending on the position. An entry level sales or customer service position does not necessarily require someone who prefers to dole out tasks and manage groups. Be honest as you answer this and then describe why you fell into the role that you did and how that was the best use of your skills.

Some other behavioral questions could be:

“Describe some actions taken in previous jobs that demonstrate you are an effective employee.”

“Give an example of a time you’ve had to handle an upset or difficult customer and tell me how you handled it.”

“Describe the strategies you use to make sure you don’t lose your temper with a customer. Give examples of how they worked effectively.”

In the end, for all these types of questions you want to concentrate on incidents where you had favorable outcomes. Prepare a short but complete story with a beginning, middle and end that demonstrates the behavior that is being evaluated. Attempt to be as specific as you can in responding to a question and, as with any interview, remember to research the company prior to the interview and have questions to ask as well. These steps are easy to explain but certainly more difficult to execute. If you can carry them out while maintaining eye contact and poise, you will have a successful interview.

These are a few examples of questions you may face. For more assistance contact the Career Services Office at 860-768-4287.