Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions

We have assembled a list of examples of competency-based behavioral interview questions. This guide is intended to help interviewers prepare for meetings with candidates.

Adaptability:

- Tell me about a situation in which you had to adjust quickly to a change in organizational, departmental, or team priorities How did the change affect you?
- Tell me about a time you had to meet a scheduled deadline while your work was being continually disrupted?
- Tell me about a time when you were able to adapt to a difficult-to-deal-with employee/co-worker.

Analytical Ability/Problem Assessment:

- At one time or another we have all thought we had successfully handled a problem only to find we had really only affected a symptom of a larger problem. Can you tell me about a time this happened to you?
- Walk me through a situation in which you had to get information by asking a lot of questions of several people. How did you know what to ask?
- If we're lucky, we can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Can you give me an example of a time you were able to identify a small problem before it became a big one?
- What factors did you take into consideration when analyzing data/info?
- How do you stay attuned to new trends in your area of expertise?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to demonstrate empathy or sympathy for someone?

Coaching:

- Tell me about a face-to-face meeting you had with someone in which you had to give them feedback for improvement. What happened?
- Describe a recent time you coached someone. What was the task? How, if at all**,** did you involve the person in the process, e.g., offer suggestions and listen to their concerns?
- Tell me about your role in coaching a direct report/team member who became more successful as a result of your assistance/coaching. Tell me about the result, i.e., if it was a promotion or was it guidance in a disciplinary situation.

Delegation of Authority and Responsibility:

- Tell me about a major project/task/assignment you delegated. Who was it delegated to within your team or department? What resources did you provide to ensure its success?
- What kind of a project/task/assignment wouldn't you feel comfortable delegating and why?
- Determining the appropriate person to whom to delegate a task can be difficult. Tell me about a time when you delegated an important project/task/assignment to the wrong person. What happened? Why? How did you resolve to make the task successful?

Developing Others

- Tell me about a time you were a mentor to someone.
- Tell me about a time one of your direct reports thought they were ready to be promoted but you disagreed. How did you handle this matter?
- We've all promoted someone to a new position in which we were sure they would be successful, only to see him or her fail. Give me an example of when this happened to you. How did you handle this?

Follow-Through

- Anyone who has ever planned a meeting, conference, or trip has had the misfortune of finding out that things didn't work out exactly as planned. Tell me about a time this happened to you. What went wrong?
- Have you ever delegated an assignment that didn't get completed on time? Did you have any warning that it wouldn't be completed? Tell me about a situation in which this happened.
- Many times it is necessary to establish milestones and/or guidelines for a direct report's project/task/assignment. How have you developed such milestones/guidelines? Give me an example of a time when you utilized milestones to monitor the progress of a project.

Individual leadership/Influencing

- We've all had the misfortune of missing a deadline. Tell me about the last time you missed a deadline because one of your co-workers didn't complete their responsibilities on time. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you checked on the status of an important project/task/assignment and discovered it was being done incorrectly. What did you do?
- Describe a situation in which you had to gain the cooperation of others outside your organization where you had no direct authority. What were the challenges and how did you overcome them?

Information Monitoring

- We all experienced times when a procedural step has been missed. Describe a time a step in an ongoing process was overlooked.
- We all have been involved in a project that got off track because we received critical data too late to make a difference. Tell me about a time this happened to you.
- It's hard to know the most critical data/information to monitor on an important project. Tell me about a time your team/group/department focused on the wrong information.

Initiative

- What have you done differently from your peers in your current organization? Why? Give me an example of what makes your work unique?
- Describe some ways in which you were able to change/improve your current position. What prompted you to make those changes?
- Describe a situation in which you saw a problem and took action to correct it rather than wait for someone else to do so.
- What have you done to add value to your department?
- Tell me about some new ideas and suggestions you have made to your supervisor in your current job. Which were accepted and why?
- What has been your biggest achievement in your current position/other roles which you would like to share? What steps did you take to achieve it?

Innovation

- Tell me about the way in which you worked with your direct reports/team members to develop new and creative ideas to solve business problems. Give me an example.
- Give me an example of a new way you were able to apply existing knowledge to solve a problem.
- Unfortunately, some solutions don't always correct problems. Can you think of a creative solution you generated that did not correct a problem? What was the solution? How did you come up with the idea?

Judgment/Problem Solving/Decision Making

- Think of a good decision you made and a recent decision that wasn't as good. What did you do differently in making those decisions?
- Tell me about a time when you had to take disciplinary action toward a direct report. How did you decide what to do?

- Describe a situation in which you received a new procedure or instructions with which you disagreed. How did you respond?
- We've all had the experience of working against a really tight deadline that didn't allow the luxury of carefully considering all options before making a decision. Give me an example of a project/task when this happened to you. What was the initial outcome?
- What was the most difficult business decision you have had to make?
- Tell me about a time when you involved others in the decision making process.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to ask your manager for assistance on a project or situation.

Maximizing Performance

- Tell me about a recent performance plan you developed for a direct report. How did you prepare? What sources of information did you use?
- We've all had to deal with employees who were unable/unwilling to contribute to their development planning process. Tell me about a time this happened to you. What did you do?
- Tell me about a direct report you managed who went from being a low performer to being a high performer. How and why did their performance improve?

Meeting Facilitation/Meeting Leadership

- Gaining others' acceptance of our ideas can be difficult. Tell me about a time you had a problem getting direct reports/team members/others to accept your idea. What approach did you use? What happened?
- We've all had direct reports/team members who did not work well together. Tell me about a meeting in which this type of relationship caused a problem. What steps did you take during the meeting to improve their relationship?
- We've all been in meetings in which no one would volunteer to talk or take action. Tell me about a time this happened in a meeting you were leading. How did you handle the meeting to break the ice?

Meeting Participation

- Getting others to accept our ideas/thoughts can be difficult. Tell me about a time you had a problem getting people to accept your ideas in a meeting. What approach did you use? What happened?
- Tell me about a meeting in which someone else suggested a new idea that affected your work. How did you react?

Motivation

- All jobs have their frustrations and problems. Describe an example of specific job conditions/task/assignments that have been dissatisfying to you. What did you do?
- What makes a job interesting to you?

Negotiation

- In what types of negotiations have you been involved? Describe a recent situation. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Describe a situation in which you negotiated with vendors or suppliers to obtain a favorable outcome for your company.
- We've all had the misfortune of trying to negotiate with a very difficult person. Give me an example of the most difficult person with whom you had to negotiate. What happened?
- Walk me through a negotiation of which you are particularly proud. What was your role? What type of preparation did you do? How was that data used?

Organizational Awareness

- Give me an example of how your knowledge of your organization's culture helped you make an important decision.
- Describe a time when you anticipated the changing needs of another department/group/team. What action did you take as a result of anticipating this changing need?
- Describe a time when you were instrumental in achieving a major organizational change in either your current position/or a previous one. How did you anticipate the need for this change?
- Describe the changing needs of a key customer. How have you used the organizational structure (policies, procedures, etc.) to keep pace with these changing needs?

Planning and Organizing/Work Management

- Tell me about either a long- or short- term plan you developed for you department.
- Everyone at one time or another is too busy to plan future activities. Tell me about a time when you were so busy you just reacted to situations rather than planned for them.
- Tell me about a time you were faced with conflicting priorities. In scheduling your time, how did you determine what was the top priority?
- What procedure have you used to keep track of items that need your attention? Tell me about a time you used that procedure.

- It's challenging to know how to prioritize/activities/responsibilities. Tell me about the last time you incorrectly prioritized a project/activity/responsibility. What happened?

Practical Learning

- In any new job, there are some things we pick up quickly and other things that take more time to learn. In your job at _____, tell me about something you picked up quickly and something that took more time to learn.
- Describe a time when you had difficulty learning something complex and what made it challenging?
- Tell me about a complex aspect of your job at _____? How long did it take you to learn it?
- We've all had times when we felt confused/overwhelmed on a project. Tell me about a time that happened to you. How did you handle it and what steps did you take to both make the project a successful and make yourself feel a sense of accomplishment?

Quality Orientation/Attention to Detail

- We all have had occasions in which we overlooked a small detail or where a manager/supervisor found an error. Describe a time that happened to you. What caused this to happen? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when the details of something you were working on were especially important. How did you attend to them?

Remote Work*

- Tell me about any experience you have working remotely or on a virtual team. What concerns or challenges did you face while working remotely and how did you overcome them?
- What expectations do you have regarding your use of technology as it relates to your success as a remote worker? What technology do you see as absolutely essential?
- Tell me about your experience using video conferencing such as Zoom, Skype, or Google Hangouts?
- Tell me about a time when you had to troubleshoot connectivity or technology issues? Can you give me an example of resolving such an issue on your own?

Results Oriented

- Tell me about techniques you have developed to assure that you complete your work on time and without error?

Risk taking

- Describe the riskiest professional decision you've had to make. How long did it take you to gather the information to make that decision? How long after that did it take to make the decision? What was the result?

- Describe a time you supported someone else's idea that had a low probability of success. Why did you support this idea? What happened?

Self-sufficiency

- Please give me an example of when you needed additional resources to complete a task, and how you went about obtaining those resources.*
- Please give me an example of a time when you successfully worked on your own under pressure.*

Strategic Leadership

- We all have had occasions when we were frustrated by not being able to implement senior management's new ideas or vision. Describe a time this happened to you.
- All managers/supervisors are faced with unpleasant changes they need to carry out. Describe the most unpleasant directive you have had to implement in your area of responsibility. What approach did you take? What were the results?
- How do you communicate organizational changes and other relevant information to your staff?
- Give me an example of a performance issue in your department and how you managed it?

Teamwork/collaboration

- Describe a situation where you had to put aside your interests for the sake of the group.
- Give me an example of how you have fostered a positive environment with teammates.
- We value diversity, equity, and inclusion at MIT. How would you help create a workplace where everyone feels safe, accepted, valued, heard, and has an opportunity to grow and succeed?
- Describe a time you worked with a group/team to determine project responsibilities. What challenges did the group/team have? What was your role?
- Tell me about an experience with someone you've worked with who was less cooperative than you needed them to be. How did you handle the situation? What was the result?
- Sometimes it can be frustrating to try and get information from other people so you can solve a problem. Please describe a situation you've had like this. What did you do?
- Interacting with others can be challenging at times. Have you ever had any difficulty getting along with peers/team members/others at work? Tell me about a specific time this happened. How did you handle the situation?

Technical/Professional Knowledge

- Even though each of us tries to be an expert in our area of work, it's impossible to know and understand everything. Tell me what aspect of your work/technical field you are still working to master. There is almost always a new task/or piece of knowledge we learn each day. In your field, what else would you like to learn/work on?
- Sometimes complex projects require additional expertise. Describe a situation in which you had to request help or assistance on one of your technical projects or assignments. Who did you get the assistance from?

Tolerance for Stress

- Describe a time you faced a particularly demanding rush situation (emergency, deadline, etc.). How did you react?
- We all have times when the pressure at work is extremely high. Describe one of the most stressful interactions you have had with an internal/external customer. How did you react?
- Work interactions can be difficult at times. Describe a highly stressful interaction you've had with your manager/supervisor/team leader. How did you react?

Work Standards

- At one time or another, everyone is pressured to sacrifice quality in order to get work done on time. Tell me about a time that happened to you. What did you do?
- Are you satisfied with your team's (department's) performance? Why or why not? What action(s) have you taken (if any) to improve the performance?
- Sometimes a supervisor's/team leader's evaluation differs from our own. Has that ever happened to you? What did you do about it?

Written/Oral Communication

- We've all had the experience of writing a memo that called for a specific action, then discovered the people who received it didn't do what they were asked to do. Can you tell me about a time this happened to you? What was the situation that caused this reaction.
- Describe a time when your ability to listen helped you communicate better? (This is asked to demonstrate sensitivity to communication levels required by different audiences/active listening.)
- When communicating with others, do you generally write them a memo or email, call, or talk to them in person?

Valuing Differences

- What is your approach to understanding the perspectives of colleagues from different backgrounds?
- Please share an example that demonstrates your respect for people and their differences. How have you worked to understand the perspectives of others?
- How would you handle a situation where a colleague was being culturally insensitive?
- Please give me an example of how you have made your direct reports feel a sense of belonging on a daily basis?
- Please describe the ways you have promoted ~~a~~ diversity, equity, and inclusion in your current or previous position(s).
- Tell me about a time when you felt uncomfortable in a group.

**Kevin Sheridan, kevinsheridanllc.com, "The Best Interview Questions for Virtual Jobs"*