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BUSINESS

Putting your best behaviour forward

Behavioural interviewing may decide whether you get the job

BY JEROME WATT
Staff Writer

Markham's Lally Rico walked into a job interview expecting the typical questions: What skills do you have? What are your strengths? What are your salary expectations?

Instead, she was asked whether she remembered a time when she had a conflict with a co-worker. How did she deal with it? Was the conflict resolved?

"I probably blubbered on," she said.

Ms Ricco didn't get the job.

She fell victim to behavioural interviewing, a common technique used by recruiters.

Behavioural interviewers ask for specific examples of past job performance, looking for signs of competency.

"Past behaviour is a good indicator of future behaviour," said Chris Duncan, marketing manager for Spherion Workforce. "They're not asking what you would do, they're asking you what did you do."

Ms Duncan said behavioural interviewing draws out an applicant's personality, identifying how he or she would fit in to an organization.

With the growth of human resources departments, behavioural interviewing is becoming the norm, Ms Duncan said.

"Anybody who is a human resources professional is using (the technique)," she said.

Marla Woolley, a recruitment manager at Markham's Allied International Credit, said behavioural interviewing is routinely used at her company.

"I find that we get the best results by using behavioural interviewing," she said. "When you use the other questions, it doesn't tell you much about the person. A lot of studies indicate it's effective."

Ms Duncan, whose company adopted the technique a year ago, said behavioural interviewing can drastically cut the attrition rate by at least 50 per cent.

In fact, the attrition rate of one of Spherion's clients dropped from 20 to 2 per cent after it started using the process.

While behavioural interviewing benefits the employer, there are a number of strategies an interviewee can use to gain advantage during an interview.

Ms Duncan said it's important to understand a typical behavioural interviewing question is followed by three or more related questions.

And it's important to answer the questions honestly, because with each question following the next, if you're lying, it's hard to keep the story straight.

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"That's when honesty comes into play," she said. "If you can't be honest, I can find out in about 10 minutes using this (technique)."

Interviewees should use the STAR method to frame their answers when asked a behavioural question:

- Situation — Tell the interviewer about the situation.

- Task — What you were trying to achieve.

- Action — What you did to achieve your results.

- Result — What the results were.

Ms Duncan said job candidates should be prepared to answer negative questions.

"The problem with these interview questions is they'll ask you about when you screwed up. That's the last thing you want to talk about," Ms Duncan said. "You've got to put a positive spin on a negative question."

If you're asked to provide an example of when you missed a deadline, Ms Duncan suggests

telling the interviewer how you dealt with the situation, emphasizing the positive outcome.

Another pitfall for the interviewee is the "What is your weakness?" question. Again, it's important to emphasize the positive.

"Some people say, 'I work too hard,'" Ms Duncan said, providing an example of a good answer. "Does any employer not want to hear that?"

Ms Duncan said employers often ask for an example of a conflict with co-workers.

People who can't provide an example don't get the job. She suggests a person might even use a situation where they got into an argument with a family member as an example.

"At some point, you've had to deal with somebody who wasn't happy," she said.

"It may not have been in a work environment. Show you know how to resolve it. That's what they are looking for. They want to know the methodology you use to make things better."

Take your time answering a question, Ms Duncan said. If you didn't hear or understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat it.

And don't talk too much.

"Don't volunteer any information they didn't ask for. You can open a lot of doors you shouldn't open," Ms Duncan said.

"You could mention personal life things you don't want to bring into an interview."

Sometimes, she said, interviewers use this as a technique for getting answers they can't legally ask.

Body language is just as important in the interview as the type of answers you give, Ms Duncan said, adding eye contact is key.

She also suggests a job seeker shouldn't slouch, should sit still and look enthusiastic.

Ms Duncan admits behavioural interviewing isn't foolproof and sometimes a fast talker may get the position rather than the person best suited for the job.

"That's the way it is, regardless,"



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Job applicants can be caught off guard by the new interviewing technique and may be in trouble if they don't answer honestly.

she said, adding behavioural interviewing works best when coupled with traditional interviewing techniques. "This is a more foolproof way of doing it."

Job seekers should also take into account behavioural interviewing when preparing a resume, according to Catherine O'Hara, the job finding club co-ordinator for Job Skills.

"It does tie into behavioural interviewing," she said. "The

resume is the basis for the discussion."

She said the resume should trumpet the person's triumphs.

"It shouldn't just be a boring (list) of job descriptions," she said of the typical resume. "You should also include a list of accomplishments. (The resume) is the connection between you and the employer."

List any accomplishment, Ms O'Hara said, even if it's a perfect attendance record.

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