

# Behavioral Interview Questions

Carnegie Mellon has identified five core competencies that are required of all employees for success at the university. These are:

- Customer Service
- Teamwork
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Communication

Behavioral interview questions allow you to explore candidates' skills and professional qualities to see how well they utilize these competencies. We have developed behavioral interviewing guidelines that focus specifically on the core competencies.

Below are some examples of behavioral interviewing questions that allow you to explore many other skills, competencies and qualities that may also be important for the specific position for which you are hiring. Click on the competency area below to see examples of interview questions that will reveal one's experience utilizing that skill.

<a href="#">Ambition</a>	<a href="#">Follow-up/Control</a>	<a href="#">Removing Obstacles</a>
<a href="#">Analytical Skill</a>	<a href="#">Impact</a>	<a href="#">Resolving Conflict</a>
<a href="#">Assertiveness</a>	<a href="#">Informing Others</a>	<a href="#">Sales</a>
<a href="#">Bottom-line Orientation</a>	<a href="#">Initiative</a>	<a href="#">Scheduling</a>
<a href="#">Caution</a>	<a href="#">Introducing Change</a>	<a href="#">Selecting and Developing People</a>
<a href="#">Collaboration</a>	<a href="#">Judgment</a>	<a href="#">Setting Performance Standards</a>
<a href="#">Creativity/Innovativeness</a>	<a href="#">Listening</a>	<a href="#">Setting Priorities</a>
<a href="#">Customer Orientation</a>	<a href="#">Motivating Others</a>	<a href="#">Solving Problems</a>
<a href="#">Decision Making</a>	<a href="#">Negotiating</a>	<a href="#">Stress Management</a>
<a href="#">Delegation</a>	<a href="#">Oral Communication</a>	<a href="#">Team Leadership</a>
<a href="#">Developing Long-Term Goals</a>	<a href="#">Performance Management</a>	<a href="#">Team Orientation</a>
<a href="#">Developing Short-Term Goals</a>	<a href="#">Persuasiveness</a>	<a href="#">Toughness</a>
<a href="#">Energy</a>	<a href="#">Presentation</a>	<a href="#">Variety</a>
<a href="#">Evaluating Alternatives</a>	<a href="#">Questioning</a>	<a href="#">Written Communication</a>
<a href="#">Flexibility</a>		

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## Ambition

- What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?
- What impact did you have in your last job?
- Careers grow and develop just like people do. They are born, have a youth, prime, and mature period. Where do you see your career? Why? What are you doing to sustain it?
- Why were you promoted in your last job?
- Looking back when your career started to gel, what were your goals? What influenced your goals? How did you influence them?
- What have you done to get ahead?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Analytical Skill

- What kinds of data and technical information do you review?
- How do you disseminate the information to other people? How do you decide what's important? How do you use this information?
- Tell me about a time when you recognized a problem, an opportunity, when other people were not aware of it? What was the situation? What did you do? How did you see the opportunity?
- Have you ever done a research paper? How did you go about putting it together?
- How do you learn about a product or a process?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Assertiveness

- What is the most competitive work situation you have experienced? How did you handle it? What was the result?
- What is the riskiest decision you have made? What was the situation? What happened?
- What projects have you started on your own recently? What prompted you to get started?
- What do you do if someone at work tries to pressure you to do something?
- What do you do when someone opposes your point of view?
- When you disagree with your manager, what do you do? Give an example.
- What kinds of challenges did you face on your last job? Give an example of how you handled them.

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Bottom-Line Orientation

- What new business opportunities did you recognize while at your last employer?
- How well has your business/facility/group performed? How did you contribute to this?
- How well has your business unit performed? What have you done to increase its performance?
- What have you done to improve the short-term strength of your business unit? What have you done to strengthen the long-term stability of your business unit?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Caution

- Tell me about a situation when it was important for you to pay attention to details. How did you handle it?
- Have you ever worked in a situation where the rules and guidelines were not clear? Tell me about it. How did you feel about it? How did you react?
- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated too much initiative?
- Some people consider themselves to be "big picture people" and others are "detail oriented". Which are you? Give an example of a time when you displayed this.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Collaboration

- Have you ever worked with a colleague to solve a problem? What was the situation? How did you go about working it through? What was your role?
- How have you helped cross-functional groups work together?
- When is the last time you had a disagreement with a peer? How did you resolve the situation?
- Some people work best as part of a group - others prefer the role of individual contributor. How would you describe yourself? Give an example of a situation where you felt you were most effective.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Creativity/Innovativeness

- What innovative procedures have you developed? How did you develop them? Who was involved? Where did the ideas come from?
- What new or unusual ideas have you developed on your job? How did you develop them? What was the result? Did you implement them?

- What have been some of your most creative ideas?
- People frequently borrow ideas they have seen elsewhere and then apply them in a new setting. How have you done this?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Customer Orientation**

- How do you handle problems with customers? Give an example.
- What have you done to improve relations with your customers?
- How do you go about establishing rapport with a customer? What have you done to gain their confidence? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Decision Making**

- Have you ever had to make a major decision on your own? What was it? How did you make it?
- How have you gone about making important decisions?
- How quickly do you make decisions? Give an example.
- When you have a new problem situation, how do you go about making a decision?
- How do you involve your manager and/or others when you make a decision?
- What kind of decision have you made where you had responsibility but not authority to implement a project?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## **Delegation**

- Do you consider yourself a macro or micro manager? How do you delegate?
- Tell me how you go about delegating work?
- What was the biggest mistake you have had when delegating work? The biggest success?
- How do you make the decision to delegate work?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Developing Long-term Goals

- What were your long-range plans at you most recent employer? What was your role in developing them?
- Did you have a strategic plan? How was it developed? How did you communicate it to the rest of your staff?
- What company plans have you developed? Which ones have you reached? How did you reach them? Which have you missed? Why did you miss them?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Developing Short-term Goals

- What were your annual goals at you most current employer? How did you develop these goals?
- What goals have you met? What did you do to meet them?
- What goals did you miss? Why did you miss them?
- How do you communicate goals to subordinates? Give an example.
- How do you involve people in developing your unit's goals? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Energy

- What sort of work hours do you normally put in?
- When you have a lot of work to do, how do you get it all done? Give an example? (Find out if it was poor planning that caused the backlog.)
- How many hours a day do you put into your work? What were your study patterns at school?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Evaluating Alternatives

- What are some of the major decisions you have made over the past (6, 12, 18) months?
- What alternatives did you develop?
- How did you assemble the information?
- How did you review the information? What process did you follow to reach a conclusion?
- Who made the decision?
- What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you? Describe one.
- Have you ever had a situation where you had a number of alternatives to choose from? How did you go

about choosing one?

- When a number of different people come to you with ideas about solving a problem, how do you do about using their information? Please give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Flexibility**

- How have you adjusted your style when it was not meeting the objectives and/or people were not responding correctly?
- What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give an example.
- When you have difficulty persuading someone to your point of view, what do you do? Give an example.
- Have you ever had a subordinate whose performance was consistently marginal? What did you do?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Follow-up and Control**

- How do you keep track of what your subordinates are doing?
- How do you evaluate the productivity / effectiveness of your subordinates?
- How do you get data for performance reviews?
- How did you keep track of delegated assignments?
- What administrative paperwork do you have? Is it useful? Why/why not?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## **Impact**

- Impact can be assessed by the manner in which the interviewee appears and interacts in the interview.
- Be aware of grooming and body language.
- Is he/she powerful in the display of this characteristic?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Informing Others**

- How do you keep subordinates informed about information that affects their jobs?
- What challenges have occurred while you were coordinating work with other units, departments, and/or divisions?
- How do you keep your manager informed about what is being done in your work area?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## **Initiative**

- What changes did you develop at your most recent employer?
- How did you get work assignments at your most recent employer?
- What sorts of projects did you generate that required you to go beyond your job description?
- What sorts of things did you do at school that were beyond expectations?
- What kinds of things really get you excited?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## **Introducing Change**

- When is the last time you had to introduce a new idea or procedure to people on the job? How did you do it?
- Have you ever had to introduce a policy change to your work group? How did you do it?
- Have you ever met resistance when implementing a new idea or policy to a work group? How did you deal with it? What happened?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## **Judgment**

- How do you go about developing information to make a decision? Give an example.
- When you have to make a highly technical decision, how do you go about doing it?
- Everyone has made some poor decisions or done something that just did not turn out right. Has this happened to you? What happened?
- What kinds of problems have you had coordinating technical projects? How did you solve them?
- How do you go about deciding what strategy to employ when dealing with a difficult customer?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Listening

- What do you do to show people that you are listening to them?
- How often do you have to rely on information you have gathered from others when talking to them? What kinds of problems have you had? What happened?
- Give an example of a time when you made a mistake because you did not listen well to what someone had to say.
- When is listening important on your job? When is listening difficult?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Motivating Others

- How do you get subordinates to work at their peak potential? Give an example.
- Have you ever had a subordinate whose work was always marginal? How did you deal with that person? What happened?
- How do you deal with people whose work exceeds your expectations?
- How do you get subordinates to produce at a high level? Give an example.
- How do you manage cross-functional teams?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Negotiating

- Tell me about the last time you had to negotiate with someone.
- How did you prepare for it?
- How did you present your position?
- What was the most difficult part?
- How did you resolve it?
- Describe the most challenging negotiation in which you were involved. What did you do? What were the results for you? What were the results for the other party?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you had to bargain with someone? How did you feel about this? What did you do? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Oral Communication



- What approach do you take in communicating with people?
- How do you go about explaining a complex technical problem to a person who does not understand technical jargon?
- What kinds of communication situations cause you difficulty? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Performance Management**

- When do you give positive feedback to people? Tell me about the last time you did. Give an example of how you handle the need for constructive criticism with a subordinate or peer.
- How do you handle performance reviews? Tell me about a difficult one.
- How do you handle a subordinate whose work is not up to expectations?
- How do you coach a subordinate to develop a new skill?
- How often do you discuss a subordinate's performance with him/her? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Persuasiveness**

- 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?
- How do you get a peer or colleague to accept one of your ideas?
- Have you ever had to persuade a peer or manager to accept an idea that you knew they would not like? Describe the resistance you met and how you overcame it.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Presentation**

- What kinds of oral presentations have you made? How did you prepare for them? What challenges did you have?
- How do you prepare for a presentation to a group of technical experts in your field?
- Tell me about the most effective presentation you have made. What was the topic? What made it difficult? How did you handle it?
- How would you describe your presentation style?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Questioning

- How have you used a question to probe for more information when a person is being evasive?
- How do you verify that you understand what someone has told you? Give examples.
- How do you show a person that you have understood what they have said?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Removing Obstacles

- What have you done to help your subordinates to be more productive?
- Have you ever dealt with a situation where communications were poor? Where there was a lack of cooperation? Lack of trust? How did you handle these situations?
- What do you do when a subordinate comes to you with a challenge?
- What have you done to make sure that your subordinates can be productive? Give an example.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Resolving Conflict

- Have you ever had to settle conflict between two people on the job? What was the situation and what did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you had to help two peers settle a dispute. How did you go about identifying the issues? What did you do? What was the result?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you had to settle an argument between two friends (or people you knew)? What did you do? What was the result?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Sales

- Describe how you prepare for a sales call for a new client.
- How do you go about making cold calls?
- Tell me about your most difficult sales experience.
- Tell me about your sales volume over the past three years. What have you done to influence it?
- How have your sales skills improved over the past three years?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Scheduling**

- How did you go about making job assignments?
- How did you assign priorities to jobs?
- When all have been over-loaded, how do your people meet job assignments?
- Describe the most difficult scheduling problem you have faced.

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Selecting and Developing People**

- What have you done to improve the skills of your subordinates?
- What was your biggest success in hiring someone? What did you do?
- What have you done to develop your subordinates? Give an example.
- How do you coach an employee in completing a new assignment?
- What was your biggest mistake in hiring someone? What happened? How did you deal with the situation?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Setting Performance Standards**

- How do you let subordinates know what you expect of them?
- How do you go about setting goals with subordinates? How do you involve them in this process?
- What performance standards do you have for your unit? How have you communicated them to your subordinates?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Setting Priorities**

- How do you schedule your time?
- When given an important assignment, how do you approach it?

- Have you ever been overloaded with work? How do you keep track of work so that it gets done on time?
- How do you manage your time?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Solving Problems**

- What are some of the problems you have faced; such as between business development and project leaders, between one department and another, between you and your peers? How did you recognize that they were there?
- Have you ever been caught unaware by a problem or obstacle that you had not foreseen? What happened?
- When was the last time something came up in a meeting that was not covered in the plan? What did you do? What were the results of your judgment?
- Tell me about a time when you did something completely different from the plan and/or assignment. Why? What happened?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Stress Management**

- What was the most stressful situation you have faced? How did you deal with it?
- How did you react when faced with constant time pressure? Give an example.
- People react differently when job demands are constantly changing; how do you react?
- What kind of events cause you stress on the job?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## **Team Leadership**

- Have you ever been in a position where you had to lead a group of peers? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever been a project leader? Give examples of problems you experienced and how you reacted.
- Tell me about the most difficult situation you have had when leading a team. What happened and what did you do? Was it successful? Emphasize the "single" most important thing you did?
- Think about the times you have been a team leader. What could you have done to be more effective?

[Back to the Top](#)

---

## Team Orientation

- Have you ever participated in a task group? What was your role? How did you contribute?
- Tell me about the most effective contribution you have made as part of a task group or special project team.
- What role have you typically played as a member of a team? How did you interact with other members of the team?
- What is the difficult part of being a member, not leader, of a team? How did you handle this?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Toughness

- What has been your major work related disappointment? What happened and what did you do?
- On many occasions, managers have to make tough decisions. What was the most difficult one you have had to make?
- What was your major disappointment?
- Tell me about setbacks you have faced. How did you deal with them?
- What is the most competitive situation you have experienced? How did you handle it? What was the result?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Variety

- Which of your jobs had the most rapid change? How did you feel about it?
- How many projects do you work on at once? Please describe.
- When was the last time you were in a crisis? What was the situation? How did you react?
- When was the last time you made a key decision on the spur of the moment? What was the reason and result?

[Back to the Top](#)

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## Written Communication

- What kinds of writing have you done? How do you prepare written communications?
- What are the most challenging documents have you done? What kinds of proposals have you written?
- How have you persuaded people through a document you prepared?

[Back to the Top](#)