

Interview Guide for Behavioral Event Interviews

(script in *italics*)

OPEN

- Thank interviewee for their time and participation
- Structure the interview (i.e., explain how interview will proceed)
 - *We are interested in learning more about how you think, feel, and act in certain situations.*
 - *In particular, we're interested in situations where you felt like you did something successfully, as well as situations where you felt like you were less successful than you would have liked. You get to define what "successful" means to you.*
 - *I will be asking you to share about situations within the last two years if possible. The reason for this is because the amount of detail I'll be asking for is sometimes hard for any of us to remember if the situations are older than two years.*
 - *I will be asking you to share about two situations where you felt successful and at least one situation when you felt less successful.*
 - *Do you have any questions for me before we get started?*

COLLECT INFORMATION

- Establish context and build rapport
 - *Could you please take 3-4 minutes to tell me a little bit about yourself any career and/or other highlights you'd like to share?*
 - You may often need to guide interviewees through this question, focusing them on only the highlights and reminding them you are looking forward to learning much more about them during the stories you'll be asking about.
- Explore relevant past experiences
 - *Thanks very much for helping us set the stage for our time together. Now I'd like to take us through the main part of the interview where I'm going to ask you to share a few real-life stories about times when you felt successful or not.*
 - *Success is something we each define in our own way.*
 - *I would ask for your patience and your permission to interrupt you frequently as you share your story. This is not because you are saying or doing anything wrong, but rather because there is a level of detail I need to get at in this type of interview that really requires that I focus your story on specific behaviors in a specific place and time that you specifically did, said, thought, or felt.*
 - *The kind of specifics I'm looking for would be like those I'd be getting if I had been following you around with a video camera on the day you lived out the story you'll be telling me. If I can't see you doing, saying, thinking, or feeling the things you're telling me, then my "video camera" isn't capturing what I need. That's when I'll interrupt and re-direct your story a bit. Okay? Any questions about this?*

- For each story (#1- Successful; #2-Less Successful; #3-Successful):
 - *Please think about a specific point in the last two years where you felt really successful (not so successful) about something. Have you got that point in mind?*
 - *If a journalist were to write a story about the events at that point in time, what might the “Headline” be? Please don’t be bashful about making you the “star!” Let’s start the title with your name and an action verb, such as “Mary Created _____.”*
 - This approach can still be used for a story where the interviewee felt they weren’t so successful. Remind them that even when outcomes aren’t as successful as we’d like, there is still a “story to be written” about the many actions we may have taken toward our desired end.
 - *Next, help me with a timeline. When did the events of this story start to unfold and how long did they last? If this event spanned a long time period, I’m not as interested in a superficial review of the whole time period, as I am about honing in with my “video camera” on some specific points along that timeline where I can “see” you doing something, saying something, thinking something, or feeling something.*
 - *So why don’t you start at the beginning? Again, please be patient as I may interrupt often to get us to those specific details at key parts of the story.*
- Probe for specific behaviors
 - Be alert for generalities and assertions, which do not produce behavioral data that is reliable. Words and phrases like “typically I do this” and “we did that” are red flags, since data that follow are not actual words, actions, thoughts, and feelings that the interviewee demonstrated in the past. Be sure you understand the interviewee’s specific role and behaviors.
 - Remember the video camera analogy
 - It is better to probe deeply at a specific event that lasted 5 minutes even though it may be within a story that spanned 5 months. If you had your video camera running for every moment of that 5-month period, you would end up with tons of “superficial,” mundane footage. But for the 5 minutes that your camera was recording the movement of your subject’s hands, lips, mind, and heart in a 5-minute interaction, you would end up with information that gives you valuable insight into the essence of their character. Focus on those moments, not the entire story.
 - Look for emotional arousal
 - When an interviewee expresses emotion, that is a clue that this may be “one of those moments” in which to probe
 - To recreate their actual words, actions, thoughts, and feelings at that time, it is sometimes helpful to ask them to recreate the scene. Who was present? Where were they? What time of day, week, month, year was it? What color were the walls, etc.? Have fun helping the subject paint the scene, which will enable them to better position themselves back at that point in time so as to give the most accurate recreation possible.

CLOSE

- Thank the interviewee for their time, and particularly for the opportunity to learn from their experience
- Answer any questions the interviewee may have
- Do not provide any interpretation of the data that have been collected

Note that this Guide is for the least structured type of BEI when there is enough time to allow an interviewee to elaborate without the interviewer prompting them to talk about certain behaviors. If time is limited and the goal is to assess specific competencies, targeted questions may be asked, rather than having the interviewee pick any successful or unsuccessful story. Just be certain to ask open-ended questions that don’t give the interviewee too much guidance as to what they think you may want to hear. An example might be, “Please tell me about a specific situation caring for an older person you really liked (didn’t like).”