



## Behavioral Guide to Sales Interviews

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## The Value and Role of Behavioral Questions

### Most standard interview questions ask what a candidate THINKS:

- Why should I hire you?.
- Where do you want to be in five years?.
- What is your greatest strength / weakness?
- How would you describe yourself?

Most candidates have heard these questions so many times, they can recite the answers in their sleep. All recruiters and how-to books will coach job hunters on the “right” answers. They reveal nothing.

### Behavioral Questions ask what somebody DOES. You pose a specific, job-related scenario, and ask how the candidate handles it.

**Pose 10 – 12 Questions:** this is sufficient for a 60 minute Behavioral Interview. Ask 8 – 10 core questions every time to every candidate, then add 2 – 3 that will be specific to the type of sales role they will fill.

**Simplest Questions are Best** – Read the script questions exactly, or develop your own using precise wording. No need to elaborate, explain, justify, or in any way tip off the candidate what you are looking for.

**You Will Quickly Learn** the questions and answers, and as you speak to more candidates, you will get a good feel for the bad – medium – and great answers. You will never forget the great answers.

Nothing peels the veneer off a candidate like a tough Behavioral Interview. Don't just take the initial answer at face value, probe and drill down on their answers. When they are vague and general, push them to be more specific. Challenge them on their answers. Ask them to clarify and give examples.

### The Questions are 50% of the Value. The Feedback you give is another 50%

Once you have completed the scenarios and questions, it's time for you to give the candidate feedback on their answers. Many candidates never get this kind of feedback on their interviews, and this is a real differentiator for you. It also sets the stage for a possible mentoring relationship should they join your team.

As you listen to the candidate answers, make a “T” on your note page, and put all the positives you see on the left and the negatives on the right. Look especially hard for positives. You will have no trouble finding many negatives. You will always hear a few answers that are particularly good or bad. Put a star next to 3-4 you want to talk about in more detail during the feedback session.

Start with the positives, and try to find 12 -15. “I really liked the way you answered this question”. I liked how you said “XYZ.” People LOVE to be quoted. It shows you are paying attention to their wonderfulness.

Move to 2-3 areas of concern you want to discuss. Always make the ratio at least 3-1 positive to negative. Indicate you have a problem with the answer, not the person. “I've found that top salespeople answer that question differently”. “Here's how you can answer that more effectively”.

At the end, you ask “what do you think?”.

This process is like putting a whip to a horse. If they are a champion Thoroughbred, they kick into a higher gear and run faster. If they are plug horse, they just get annoyed. You decide what kind of horse you have.

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## 1. Price Objection

Your prospect says “I like you and your product, but your price is just too high.”  
How do you handle that?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>NEGOTIATING STYLE</b> This objection can either be a value objection or a bargaining tactic. The salesperson needs to figure out which before responding	<b>(Value Track)</b> Let me explain again how wonderful our product / service is and why you should buy it <b>(Bargaining Track)</b> How much too high? Where do we have to be to get your business? If I can reduce price, would you buy? <b>(Combative)</b> Compared to what? <b>Best Answer:</b> (Cushion) I can appreciate you want to get the most out of your investment. (Find out underlying issue) Can you clarify for me why you say that? Then handle appropriately EITHER Value or Bargaining Track, as necessary

## 2. Gate Keeper

You find out the person you are dealing with is not the final decision maker. When you try to get around him / her, you are blocked. What do you do?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>COURAGE:</b> Does this salesperson deal comfortably at high levels? Do they know how to get past gatekeepers?	<b>(Timid)</b> I don't want to upset the person, I would ask them if I could meet the Decision Maker <b>(Average)</b> I would make every effort to get the Gatekeeper to let me speak to the Decision Maker <b>(Aggressive)</b> If they don't let me get me to the Decision Maker, I'll find my own way to get to the top person <b>Best Answer:</b> That would never happen, because I always find out who signs the check before I start the sales process. I'm too busy to deal with people that can't make a decision. I either meet the top guy, or I don't waste my time.

## 3. 2nd Place

A Salesperson keeps hearing “I like you and your product, but the other solution better suits our needs”.  
What's really going on?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>LISTENING:</b> The key to this question is the customer quote. Any other response means they didn't pay attention to the way you posed the question	<b>(Closing)</b> The salesperson didn't close hard enough <b>(Price)</b> The customer went with a lower priced competitor <b>(Demo)</b> The salesperson didn't demo the product well enough <b>Best Answer:</b> If the other product better suited their needs, then he either didn't understand their needs well enough or didn't relate the benefits of our product to their needs well enough. He / she got outsold.

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## 4. Last Sale Won

Tell me about a sale you made against difficult competition. What did you win and why did they pick you?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>This is really a setup for the next question. You almost don't care how they answer. Let them beat their chest and feel good for a minute.</b>	<b>(Persistence)</b> I worked and worked and tried and tried <b>(Schmoozed)</b> I got to know the key people and they liked me <b>(Identified Key)</b> We uncovered a key need or application that the competition didn't <b>(Rigged the Process)</b> We got with the Technical Person and helped her write the RFP <b>(Pulled it out of the Fire)</b> We were told "no", and I heroically saved the day

## 5. Last Sale Lost

Tell me about a **winnable** sale you lost against difficult competition. What did you lose and, with 20/20 hindsight, **what could you have done differently to make the sale?**

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b> You want to see if hold themselves accountable and if they can learn from mistakes. The keys <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Was the loss in or out of their control?</li><li>2. Will they admit they could have done it differently and better?</li></ol>	<b>Bad Answer:</b> We lost on price. (why is this bad? A great salesperson would have either anticipated a low-value opportunity and passed, or would have worked to re-set the criteria in a more favorable way). <b>(Dirty Dealing)</b> They used us to work the other guys for a lower price <b>(Third Bid)</b> They never wanted us in the first place. They needed us to be the third bid <b>(Insider Trading)</b> The guy's brother works at the competitor's company <b>Best Answer:</b> We got outsold because of XXXX. I learned a lesson, and ever since then, I've made sure to do YYYYY.

## 6. Manage Time

How do you keep track of your goals and objectives? How about your appointments and follow-up tasks?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>ORGANIZATION</b> Is their appointment calendar written or printed, and it's easily accessible? Do they always have it with them? Any Written Goals?	<b>(Multiple Places)</b> I have a PDA, a desktop calendar, and I use Outlook <b>(Somewhere else)</b> It's in my car, my office, etc. <b>(In my Head)</b> I remember when my appointments are <b>Best Answer:</b> I write down every contact and every appointment. I've got every person and phone number for the last five years. Want to see? Also: Here are the things I am going to accomplish this week, month, year.

## 7. Priorities

It's 10:00 AM on a Monday morning. You have five things to do. What order would you do them?

- Your manager pops his head in and asks, "hey can you give me a forecast?"
- A person hands you a phone message and says "this person called in asking for information"
- You have a proposal you need to work on, due later in the week
- A current customer has asked you a technical question that will require some research, such as "what's the range of the XYZ wireless phone?"
- Like all salespeople, you need to block out time to prospect and set some appointments

Which of these activities would you do first, second, third, fourth, and fifth? Why?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<p><b>You will be amazed how many different variations of answers you get to this question.</b></p> <p><b>Proactive or Reactive: The key to this question is the time. 10:00 AM Monday is "Selling Time". Finding and selling customers comes first. Everything else, later.</b></p> <p><b>Also, pay attention to if they write the questions down or remember them without prompting.</b></p>	<p><b>(Tell you what they think you want to hear)</b> Forecast first, Customer Question second, Call in third, etc - (bad answer because they are not focused on sales results)</p> <p><b>(I'm too busy to sell)</b> I would handle the Customer Question first, since customers come first with me (another bad answer. This is an excuse. The way the question is phrased, the customer question is neither urgent nor important)</p> <p><b>(Money Oriented)</b> Call in first, Proposal Second, Prospect third</p> <p><b>(Bullshitter)</b> Cold Call first, Forecast second, Call in third (They are telling you what they think you want to hear. No rational person would cold call before responding to a customer call in)</p> <p><b>Best Answer:</b> Anything I can do outside of business hours, I will. I'll do the Proposal and Customer research / Question after hours. Call in first, since that's hottest. Prospect second. If your forecast was important, you would have asked me earlier, and if you had, I would have already done it. Therefore, it must not be important. I'll do it later.</p>

## 8. Steps of the Sale

Describe for me the first thing you like to do in a sales cycle, the second, etc. all the way to the end

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<p><b>This is One of the most important questions you can ask.</b></p> <p><b>Pay special attention to when the sale STARTS and when it ENDS.</b></p> <p><b>Count the number of selling steps. The more steps they give you, the larger the size sale they will be accustomed to selling.</b></p> <p><b>Do they have a "Selling Process" or are they going along with the customer's "Buying Process?" Who is driving the sale?</b></p>	<p><b>"It Depends"</b> - (Bad Answer: Of course every sale is different. Still, they need to have a plan)</p> <p><b>One or two step sale:</b> First customer visit, I do everything. Next visit, give proposal (Another bad answer. This is giving the proposal before they have "earned the right")</p> <p><b>Getting ready to get ready</b> I find out potential customer name. Do research. Write letter. Make phone call. Follow up. (Bad Answer: you want somebody who gets out and makes something happen)</p> <p><b>Do everything over the phone to "save time";</b> (Another bad answer. This is great for inside sales, bad for outside sales).</p> <p><b>Best Answers Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-call "Blueprinting"</li> <li>The prospecting call for the initial appointment is a separate step</li> <li>Multiple discovery – sales advance steps</li> <li>Discovery of Customer's Business Drivers</li> <li>Face to Face Proposal Review with Customer</li> <li>Multiple Steps after the Close – Implementation, Payment, etc</li> <li>"Once I make a sale, I look for more opportunities with the customer."</li> </ul>

## 9. Prospecting

Describe how you identify and develop new prospects

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>Outbound Sales Comprehension</b>	<p>I get a lot of referrals</p> <p>I cold call if I have to, but I prefer to work smart....( a euphemism for being lazy)</p> <p>I have a network of people I trade leads with</p> <p>I prospect on Tuesdays and Thursdays, because customers are busy on Mondays and getting ready for the weekend on ....(Bad answer. Customers buy at all times)</p> <p>I need to be generating new appointments at all times. I get them any way I can: referrals, networking, lead groups, vendors, telemarketing. I read business journals, I do joint marketing with complementary businesses, I do... I do..... I do....</p>

## 10. Activity

How many customer appointments do you need to have per week? How many of these are new prospects?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<p><b>JOB COMPREHENSION: Make sure you get specific answers, not wide ranges or “as many as possible”.</b></p> <p><b>Do they understand the business enough to give you realistic estimates?</b></p> <p><b>Each type of sale will have a different activity profile. Big ticket sales will have more steps and fewer calls than SMB. New Business Development is different than Account Management.</b></p>	<p>As many as possible (Bad answer. What does that mean?)</p> <p>10 – 20 a week (Don't allow vague answers like this. Would 12 appointments be a success or failure, then? Make them give you a number)</p> <p>I do whatever it takes (Great. And that would be how many?)</p> <p>I shoot for ten appointments per week. 3-5 new prospects, and the rest are call backs. (This is specific and realistic for most companies).</p> <p>I work to get the funnel I need to hit my objective. For \$20 - 50,000 size sales, I would need 3 to 5 per week.</p> <p>I like to get one new short, one new medium, and one new long term opportunity every week</p>

## 11. Qualify

How do you determine whether an opportunity is qualified or not?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<p><b>SALES SYSTEM The single biggest problem salespeople have is they don't qualify opportunities effectively or realistically.</b></p> <p><b>Here is where you find out if the candidate understands what this is about. There are many good selling systems. Do they use one?</b></p>	<p>I ask a lot of questions</p> <p>I ask what they are looking for and which competitors they are talking to</p> <p>I always find out who the decision maker is going to be</p> <p>I ask the “W” questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why?</p> <p><b>Best Type Answer:</b> I always confirm the customer has the Money, Authority, and Need to buy something in the next 3 – 6 months. I confirm every answer I get with someone else in the organization, and make sure I understand every step of the procurement process.</p>

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## 12. Differentiate

How do you differentiate yourself from the competition?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>SELLING SKILL:</b> The best salespeople nail this question. Bad ones struggle with it. A real litmus test of how good they are.	<p>I sell myself first. People buy because of me</p> <p>I tell them we have the best product and the best service</p> <p>I tell them up front we aren't going to be the cheapest, but we are the best</p> <p>Our company has lots of positives, but I only talk about the ones important to the customer.</p> <p><b>Best Answer:</b> I look to determine the customer's 2 – 3 biggest hot buttons. Then I show how our company excels at delivering results in those areas.</p>

## 13. Persuasion

Tell me about a time you changed an important person's opinion

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<b>PERSUASIVE SKILLS:</b> Drill down on this question, and ask lots of details. If someone has flipped a Decision Maker, they'll give you rich detail. If they haven't, you'll get vague generalities	<p>They were going to go with the other company, but I turned him around <b>(How?)</b></p> <p>When they saw our solution and price, they changed their mind <b>(Why?)</b></p> <p>They were planning to buy the other solution, but when they saw our demo, they decided to go with me</p> <p><b>Best Type of Answer:</b> The I.T. Manager was pushing for XYZ. We went to the CFO and showed how our solution would have a higher ROI and lower Total Cost of Ownership than the other systems. Then we came up with a creative leasing vehicle to wrap it all together. The CFO over-ruled the I.T. department and went with our solution.</p>

## 14. Ethics

A prospect is ready to purchase a solution, but you don't think they'll be happy with it. Do you take the sale?

LOOKING FOR	COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)
<p><b>Bad business drains time and creates unhappy customers. Some salespeople generate bad business by over promising, misleading, or under-selling customers. Smoke this out before it comes back to bite you and your company.</b></p> <p><b>Keep pushing this question until you find the point where the salesperson will walk away from a sale. Bad salespeople never do!</b></p>	<p>Of course I'll take the sale</p> <p>I'll take the sale but tell them they should really go with something different</p> <p>I'll sell it to them and then sell the upgrade so it will work correctly</p> <p>I'll try my best to convince them they need to purchase something different. If they buy anyway, I'll write them a letter confirming we recommended something different</p> <p><b>Best Answer:</b> I only want happy customers. If I really think they will be unhappy with the solution, I'll either persuade them to go with the right choice or walk away from the sale.</p>

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## 15. Role Specific Questions (examples):

- a. Have you had experience dealing with RFPs? What did you do?
- b. Have you sold to committees? What did you do?
- c. Have you sold to State / Local Government? What did you do?
- d. What is your experience in the Health Care vertical? What did you do?
- e. What is your experience selling Managed Services? What did you do?
- f. Have you ever opened a new sales territory? What did you do?
- g. What is your experience selling new technologies?
- h. How do you determine the best Data Center solution for your customer?

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### LOOKING FOR

### COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)

**FAMILIARITY WITH THE ROLE:** Determine what the learning curve is by asking specific questions that only experienced people can answer.

I can do that, no problem

I haven't done that much, but I can learn quickly

I go with what the engineer recommends

**Best Answer:** Here's how I've been successful in that market for years....

## 16. Wrap Up

This concludes my questions. Do you have any questions or comments about this session?

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### LOOKING FOR

### COMMON ANSWERS (Paraphrased)

**SALESMANSHIP:** This interview is a selling situation. How does the candidate handle it?

No, I don't have any questions **(REALLY Bad Answer)**

How did I do? **(Great salespeople always take the temperature of the customer)**

Do they press you for feedback?

What do you think? What's the next step? **(Great response)**

Do they try to close for something?

**Best Answer:** I'm wondering how my answers compared with the best people you've ever interviewed? What did I do well? How can I get better?

Do they sit back and wait for you to describe the next step?.

A vigorous debate about some of the questions / responses is a **GOOD**, not a **BAD** thing. You want them to have confidence to challenge you and question your feedback.

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