



Guide to Hiring the Best Salespeople

Using the Power of Behavioral Interview Questions

Mike Mazzei

TALENTRON[™]
Better Interviews = Better Hires

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Behavioral Interviewing Leads to Great Hires	4
The Anatomy of a Behavioral Interview Question	5
Hiring Great Prospectors	7
Hiring Great Qualifiers.....	9
Hiring Great Presenters.....	11
Hiring Great Closers.....	12
Hire Great Salespeople Using Behavioral Interviews.....	14
Talentrion Makes Behavioral Interviews Easy	15



Introduction



“Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off of the goal.”

—Vince Lombardi

This guide is designed to help you identify and hire salespeople that have the skills you’re looking for—skills that will enable your company to meet its sales goals.

Sales is a process of **prospecting, qualifying, presenting and closing a sale**. This guide covers how to interview candidates to find the strongest salesperson who possesses the skills you want.

It’s a well-known fact that the best predictor of future behavior and performance is recent past behavior and performance. You can use this insight to predict how a new sales rep is likely to perform for you.

By using behavioral interview questions, you can identify the behavior candidates used to achieve their most recent sales results.

Good hiring processes encourage quality job matches, boosting employee satisfaction and ultimately, worker productivity.

By contrast, poorly designed interview processes — either too easy or too difficult — are associated with less healthy company cultures over time.

Source: Glassdoor Economic Research



Behavioral Interviewing Leads to Great Hires

Knowing how to properly interview candidates can ultimately lead to the success of a company. How can your company make good hires? By using Behavioral Interview Questions, of course.

Behavioral interviewing is effective because:

- It elicits specific examples about past behavior on the job.
- It creates deeper discussions about actions taken and results achieved.
- It confirms or challenges an interviewer's gut reaction.

Behavioral interviewing is considered the gold standard when it comes to interviewing candidates; a knowledge of a candidate's recent past behavior and experiences is a reliable indicator of their performance in similar, future situations.



Behavioral interviewing is said to be **55%** predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while **Traditional** interviewing is only **10%** predictive.

—Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

The Anatomy of a Behavioral Question

“Asking the right questions takes as much skill as giving the right answers.”

—Robert Half

Behavioral interview questions have at least two parts, and preferably three. These parts are referred to as the **Setup**, the **Situation or Problem**, and the **Bar Raiser**.

Part 1: Setup

Describe a time...

Tell me about...

Give me an example of...



Part 2: Situation or Problem

when you had to close a sale with a resistant prospect...

a situation when you were giving a sales presentation...

how you have approached qualifying someone...

Part 3: Bar Raiser

Increase the difficulty by adding or removing resources from the situation, such as people, support, time, or money.

and it was the end of the fiscal year.

and the prospect gave you half the time you expected.

with whom you found it difficult to establish rapport.

continued >

The Anatomy of a Behavioral Question

Put all three parts together to create seamless behavioral questions.

Setup	Situation or Problem	Bar Raiser
Describe a time	when you had to close a sale with a resistant prospect	and it was the end of the fiscal year.
Tell me about	a situation when you were giving a sales presentation	and the prospect gave you half the time you expected.
Give me an example of	how you have approached qualifying someone	with whom you found it difficult to establish rapport.

Getting A Complete Answer with PAR

If the candidate answers any question superficially, you can dig deeper with [PAR](#). PAR stands for Problem, Action, and Result and is a listening tool to confirm you are getting a complete behavioral answer.

Problem What **problem** or situation did you face?

Action What **action** did you take?

Result What **result** did you achieve?

Listen for these three elements, but beware, they do not often appear in this order.

Behavioral interviewing reduces the concern that someone is lying to you. It is very [difficult for someone to lie to a behavioral interview question](#).



Hiring Great Prospectors



“A hungry dog hunts best.”

—Lee Trevino

Prospecting is a highly prized, highly desirable skill, and many companies are successful because they tend to hire candidates that have well-developed prospecting skills.

First, we’ll discuss how you can tell if a candidate is a great Prospector.

What kind of interview questions can you ask candidates to find the one with the best [prospecting skills](#)—the one who is hungry?

To increase your odds of determining which candidate is the best prospector use behavioral interview questions.

Here’s an example of a behavioral interview question designed to uncover prospecting skills. Notice the Setup, Situation and Bar Raiser.

- **Tell me about a time** that your prospecting skills helped you find a prospect **that your competition was not even aware of.**

It would be difficult to prepare for that question. Unless you have a great storyteller on your hands, your candidate would need to call upon a real-life situation.

continued >

“If you don’t have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?”

—John Wooden



Hiring Great Prospectors

Here's another example of a question for prospecting.

- **Walk me through** the process that you used to find the prospect **that led to your largest sale last year.**

The candidate either has a great prospecting process, or they do not. The more detail they give you, the more likely they're the great Prospector that you're looking to hire.

Here are three more behavioral questions focused on prospecting:

- **Describe your prospecting approach** to getting a meeting **when you've been getting several rejections.**
- **Tell me about** your favorite voicemail message you leave for a prospect **that substantially increases your chances of getting a return call.**
- **Tell me about** the amount of time you dedicate to prospecting **for new business each week.**

More difficult job interviews
are statistically linked to
higher employee satisfaction.

Source: Glassdoor Economic Research



Hiring Great Qualifiers

“Quote and hope. The calling card of a sales dope.”

—Anonymous

Great qualifiers don't waste a company's valuable time or resources with prospects that will likely never buy.

Qualifying may not seem like it is as important as other sales skills like prospecting or closing, but salespeople who know how to qualify close more business. The most prolific sales closers do their homework to qualify a prospect long before they ever get to the closing question.



Sneak preview: Salespeople who properly qualify prospects know exactly what hot buttons to stress during their presentation.

How do you find out if the candidate with an amazing resume is a great qualifier?

Instead of using open- or closed-ended questions, instruct the candidate to talk about their own experiences. And, do it in a very specific way that tells you about their own past behavior. Again, do this by using [behavioral interview questions](#).

continued >



Hiring Great Qualifiers

Here are some behavioral questions you can use to identify a salesperson's experience as a qualifier focused on typical sales qualifying areas:

- Budget:** Give me an example of a time you lost a sale because the prospect could not afford your product.
- Authority:** Tell me about a time that you assumed you were talking to the decision maker and you were not.
- Need:** Give me some examples of how you determine if your product will solve the prospect's problems when you have limited information.
- Timing:** Tell me how you knew when the prospect was ready to buy on your last big sale.
- Roadblocks:** Tell me about the biggest roadblock that you identified before it became a roadblock.

When the candidate answers behavioral questions, you can tell how skilled they are based on their answers.

The [confident qualifiers](#) will be happy to share their strengths and their struggles. We can have a meaningful discussion with them by talking about the situation.



A lot of money is lost every year due to making the wrong choices when it comes to hiring.

For jobs in the range of \$152k - \$220k,
**over \$100,000 is lost
in productivity alone.**

A recent study from the National Business Research Institute (NBRI) confirms this fact.

Hiring Great Presenters

“Grasp the subject. The words will follow.”

—Cato the Elder

The great presenters are generally the ones who have qualified for a potential client’s Budget, Authority, Need, Timing and Roadblocks and develop their presentation in light of those understandings to shorten the sales cycle.

[Great presenters](#) also emphasize how a product or service is the best solution to satisfy that particular need. When a salesperson has qualified the timing of the prospect, they can synchronize their presentation with the prospect’s decision-making process.



If there are any specific impending events associated with the purchase, the salesperson will present themselves as a partner in the process rather than a nagging salesman trying to close a sale at all costs.

Good presentation skills are too important and cannot be assumed based only on the way the candidate talks about presenting. With behavioral questions, ask them to tell you stories about their actual, personal experience with presenting.

Below are some specific behavioral interview questions to ask the candidate in the interview.

- [Articulate](#) the compelling purchasing proposition for your current product or service [in 60 seconds or less](#).
- [Tell me about](#) the last time a prospect forgot your appointment [and your boss was riding with you](#).
- [Describe a time](#) that you had to present [in less than ideal conditions](#).
- [Tell me about a time](#) that the decision maker told you your product wasn’t worth what you were asking [and you made the sale anyway](#).

Hiring Great Closers

“The difference between try and triumph is a little ‘umph’.”

—Marvin Phillips

When it comes to sales skills, the skills needed for closing the sale seem to receive more attention than any other in the sales game.

Let’s start with the obvious. You may be asking, “Shouldn’t a great closer close the sale with me in the interview? And shouldn’t they get me to agree to hire them in the interview?”

The answer is yes and no.

First of all, unless your job listing was explicit enough, they may not know that hiring a great closer was your highest priority.

Second, some of their interviews will be with non-decision makers. Only the hiring manager will have the authority to hire them.

But yes, most good closers should attempt a trial close. They might ask, “So, how did I do?” or “Is there anything about me or my experience that might cause you to think I would not be a good fit?” These types of closing questions can indicate that you are talking to someone with good closing skills.

Another nice trial close would be, “What is the next step?”

Experiencing the sales candidate trying to close you is one of the better indicators that you have a great closer—especially if they do it smoothly.

A [great closer](#) will put a spotlight on their superior skills. You will have given them the perfect opportunity to go into descriptions of their skills with real life examples.

continued >



Hiring Great Closers

A great closer will shine through regardless of whether or not they try to close you in the interview.

Here are a few behavioral questions designed to get information about their experience in closing sales:

- Describe a time that you lost a major sale after using your favorite closing technique.
- Walk me through some examples of how you close tough prospects.
- Tell me about a sale that you closed that was tough and rewarding.
- Give me an example of a time that you could tell that the prospect was ready to buy and how you knew it.

The confident closer will not have a problem sharing both their successes and their failures closing sales. This is because they are a student of closing the sale. They know that failure is just part of the game.

According to a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review,

80% of employee turnover is due to bad hiring decisions.

In other words, finding ways to substantially improve the quality of the people we hire is crucial.



Hire Great Salespeople Using Behavioral Interviews

“If you think hiring professionals is expensive, try hiring amateurs.”

—Red Adair

When it comes to hiring great salespeople, you need them to be good at prospecting, qualifying, presenting and closing. Behavioral interview questions make it possible to find that one candidate who can do it all.

Using behavioral interview questions throughout an interview process is the only true way to get to the real truth about a candidate. As we’ve said, the best predictor of future behavior is recent past behavior. We have created questions that are specifically designed to get candidates to tell us about their past behavior.

With the help of this eBook you can create useful [interview guides](#). Then you will become more proficient at asking behavioral interview questions. And when you do, you’ll find yourself hiring exactly the type of salespeople that you want to hire.

No company can afford to leave it to chance and simply hope that the person being hired will be a winner.



The Bottom Line

**Hiring great salespeople is mission critical
for your organization.**

Talentron Makes Behavioral Interviews Easy

“You need to have a collaborative hiring process.”

—Steve Jobs

Still feel like you need some help conducting great behavioral interviews and making great hires?

[Talentron](#) might be the answer you are looking for.

Talentron was created from our real world experience as talent acquisition professionals. We learned to interview the hard way, by doing it over-and-over again and refining our techniques over time.

Talentron was created so companies can capitalize on the power of collaborative interviewing.

We believe that great performers only want to work with other great performers. One of the tools of collaborative interviewing is the effective use of behavioral questions and follow-up probes. As you have seen, these types of interview questions yield a much richer conversation, more useful information, a positive candidate experience and a better [quality of hire](#).

Want to take Talentron for a spin? [Click Here](#)