
Reducing Hiring Risks with Your Interview Process: Implementing Behavioral-Based Interviews for Sales Talent

“In the competitive Education and Technology market, a weak interview process can ultimately cost you revenue. When we help our clients hire, we evaluate our candidates with a strategic vetting process to reduce the risks of making a bad hire—and a fundamental part of our process is Behavioral-Based Interviews. ”

~ Lisa Sacchetti, CEO of The Renaissance Network



The Renaissance Network

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Introduction

The interview process, when performed well, can help you determine if a candidate has the necessary qualifications to help you build your business. When the interview process is strong, one can reduce the risks of making a bad hire and improve one's ability to onboard the right candidate.

At The Renaissance Network, we often are asked what the best approach is to interviewing, particularly within our niche market of sales team expansion for Education and Technology. While there are many different approaches to the interview process, we have developed a strategic approach to interviewing and evaluating potential candidates, where behavioral-based interviews play a key role. The Renaissance Network is pleased to offer our White Paper on *Reducing Hiring Risks with Your Interview Process: Implementing Behavioral-Based Interviews for Sales Talent*

Defining The Purpose of Interviews

In general, interviews are to qualify candidates for a particular role through the use of a series of phone, virtual, and in-person meetings. There are four primary purposes of the interview process:

1. To confirm facts listed in a candidate's resume;
2. To uncover additional information on a candidate's past performance as it applies to your organization and the new role;
3. To determine if a candidate's past experience could translate well into the role at your company; and
4. To uncover information on a candidate's personality and cultural compatibility for your organization.

With these purposes in mind, one can begin to understand the strengths and weaknesses of particular interview techniques in determining if a candidate has the right competencies to be effective in a new role, and, additionally, one can develop an interview strategy to reduce the risk of making the wrong hire.

Traditional Interview Techniques and Their Weaknesses

Many hiring managers will create a list of appropriate questions to ask an interviewee, falling into two categories: the traditional/chronological interview question and the hypothetical interview question.

Traditional interview questions and chronological interview questions include questions such as: "How would you describe yourself?" and "Tell me about your sales experience at



Company X". These kinds of questions can help you verify facts listed on a candidate's resume and can serve as the starting point of an interview process to match qualifying experiences to the job requirements at your organization.

After asking about general historic facts through the use of traditional and chronological questions, many hiring managers will subsequently ask hypothetical interview questions, such as "How would you handle a difficult client?" While hypothetical questions can show a candidate's ability to present how they may approach a situation, a candidate also has the opportunity to tell potential employers what the candidate thinks the employer wants to hear, focusing on strengths and limiting discussion of weaknesses. Particularly for salespeople who are used to pitching their products and services to clients, they will have their own sales pitch prepared to sell themselves as the solution to the hiring problem. Additionally, if a candidate has had any interview training, he or she will know exactly how to present himself or herself as the ideal candidate. As a result, one runs the risk of hiring someone based on a gut feeling and unsubstantiated experiences; while you can rule candidates out of your process based on your gut feeling, you cannot rule candidates in.

Because of the limitations of these standard kinds of interview questions and the risks associated with hiring on a gut feeling rather than on fact, we, at The Renaissance Network, also employ behavioral-based interviews. Behavioral-based interviews elicit historic facts from candidates to help us determine if a candidate has been able to achieve success equivalent to what the new role will require.

The Science of Behavioral-Based Interview Questions

Behavioral-based interviews ask candidates to describe how they have handled specific employment- or other life-related situations in their past, with the intention of revealing historic facts about the candidate's performance, if the candidate's past performance would translate well into the new role, and additional behavioral competencies including but not limited to personality, presentation skills, and overall demeanor.

Scientifically, past outcomes are a good predictor for future ones; so, the information gathered from the candidate can help you predict if he or she will be successful in the new role. When behavioral-based questions not only ask about historic data but also how those outcomes were achieved, one can use a candidate's response and how the candidate presents his or her response to determine if candidates have the competencies necessary for success.

Strong answers to behavioral-based questions will be succinct and well communicated; the candidate will include the **Situation**, the **Task(s)** necessary to solve the problem at hand, the **Actions** taken, and the **Result**. Therefore, answering these questions well is called the STAR Technique. To have the candidate elaborate on these questions, appropriate follow-up behavioral-questions should be asked to dig deeper into the candidate's competencies and



reveal additional strengths and weaknesses, all the while reducing the risks of making a bad hire.

Sample Behavioral-Based Interview Questions

Some examples of behavioral-based questions include:

- Give me a specific example of a time when you obtained a new customer without any introduction or referral. What were the steps you took to obtain the customer and what was the outcome?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you lost a big deal that you thought you were going to close. What did you learn from that situation?
- Pick a day last week and give me a step-by-step overview of your day. How did you plan for that day? Did you execute your plan? And, what were the results of your activities?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to change the organization of the sales department that you managed. What were the steps that you took, and what was the outcome?

Standard Interview Questions vs. Behavioral-Based Interview Questions

To compare the differences between Standard Interview Questions vs. Behavioral-Based Interview Questions, let's look at the following example:

	Standard Question Format	Behavioral-Based Question Format
Question	How many new customers will you bring in your first year?	What was your quota for net-new customers (<i>the situation</i>); what were the <i>tasks</i> you were supposed to take to meet that quota; what were the <i>actions</i> you took to meet your quota; what were the <i>results</i> ?
Response	I would like to bring in 45 new customers in year one.	My quota was 50 new customers. I had to cold-call, develop leads, conduct in-person meetings, and close new business. I cold-called my potential targets, set up face-to-face meetings, demo-ed my products, but I only closed 18 new customers.

The standard interview question allows the candidate to give the interviewer the best possible answer—the one he or she thinks the interviewer wants to hear (45 new customers for the year) and not necessarily based on historic performance data (that only 18 new deals were closed by the candidate last year). By asking a behavioral-based



question to uncover the truth about past performance, one can make logical conclusions about the candidate's ability to meet the target benchmarks required by the new role. When asking behavioral-based questions, and their subsequent follow up questions, candidates will reveal if the historic data and the actions taken match the requirements of the new role and the candidates' logical thought process, their communications skills, and their personality.

When the candidate profile has been developed prior to the interview process, the hiring company can build behavioral-based interview questions around those qualities for the interview process. Questions can be developed to get an understanding of if candidates are critical-thinkers and self-starters, or if they have a willingness to learn and are self-confident. Behavioral-based questions can also reveal candidates' attitudes towards teamwork and their definition of and ability surrounding professionalism. Through employing behavioral-based interviews as part of your interview process, the hiring manager will have a stronger understanding of his or her candidates, make hiring decisions grounded in fact, and reduce the risks of hiring for the wrong reasons and of hiring the wrong candidate.

Why Use A Headhunter to Conduct Behavioral-Based Interviews

Anyone can ask behavioral-based interview questions. However, knowing how to ask the second, third, and fourth behavioral-based question is a learned task and one that must be utilized many times over to truly become effective. More often than not, hiring is only a small portion of a manager's responsibilities; interviewing is an even smaller portion of his or her day-to-day job. As a result, hiring managers may not be able to develop the technique to its fullest as they are not implementing it regularly.

Conducting multiple interviews on separate days using these techniques can be time consuming for hiring managers who have other responsibilities in addition to interviewing; interviewing in addition to the time required to hunt candidates and review resumes can greatly impact a hiring manager's ability to focus on and perform other responsibilities. As a result, many hiring managers do not have capacity to spend the necessary amount of time hunting and evaluating candidates.

In contrast, headhunters who are trained in behavioral-based interviewing will conduct countless interviews on a daily basis; they have the ability to improve upon their interview techniques and can pick up on the clues within the candidate's answers to get the best sense of the candidates' abilities. Strong headhunters will be committed to evaluating candidates and can reduce the amount of time and risks associated with hiring for their client.



Why Use The Renaissance Network as Your Trusted Search Partner

Working with a strategic search partner in your own niche market allows you to gain the expertise of a recruiting and evaluation process grounded in your own market. At The Renaissance Network, we conduct countless behavioral-based interviews each day, focused exclusively on sales talent in the Education and Technology space. Our recruiters are seasoned in the technique and in the market. Therefore, they are prepared to ask appropriate behavioral-based questions and follow up questions which are specific to the Education and Technology industry.

Our focus within this market allows us to uncover what candidates have achieved in the past, who they are selling to, how they have met quotas, and how their experience and performance compares to the market at large. Because our recruiters know the Education and Technology market so well, they can gauge the ability of candidates both on their interviews, and use their knowledge of funding, competition, and the market at large within particular territories to determine the validity of the candidates' responses.

When we partner with our clients, their hiring managers can focus on growing revenue rather than on poor resumes and under-qualified candidates. Instead, we aggressively hunt and evaluate candidates, and present our client only the best talent for our client's needs. As a result, our process has a proven track record of hunting, vetting, and strong Education and Technology sales talent under aggressive time frames so that our clients can beat competitors to market.



The Renaissance Network

The Renaissance Network's Corporate Facts

The Renaissance Network is an award-winning search firm, specialized in uncovering and hunting over-achieving sales and leadership talent in the Education and Technology markets. We strategize with our clients on their sales, marketing, and leadership teams' organization and compensation plans, we analyze the competencies necessary to be successful contributors to our clients' organizations, and then we aggressively hunt top talent within the industry. With a combination of efficient methodologies, knowledgeable team members, and the largest network of contacts within Education, The Renaissance Network offers its clients a trusted search partner, decreased search time, increased hiring success, confidence in hiring, improved internal interview effectiveness, and a rapid market impact.

- One of the first six search firms nationwide fully accredited by the National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS)
- Ranked as one of the top 25 recruiting firms in the Northeast by the Boston Business Journal
- Member of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA)
- Member of the SIIA Education Division Membership Committee
- President, Lisa Sacchetti, is a member of the Software & Information Industry division, a member of the SIIA Education Division Membership Committee, and was named one of Boston Business Journal's 40 under 40 executives for 2008

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"As an organization, we had always focused exclusively on inbound candidates versus actively cultivating leads and using recruiters for screening, recruitment, and negotiation. When we partnered with the Renaissance Network, it not only brought us a pool of candidates who we would never have been exposed to, but the quality of the candidates was the highest I've seen in my 7+ years with our company. Additionally, the time saved internally in reviewing resumes, screening, and coordinating travel, allowed us to focus our attention on driving our sales efforts."

~ Mike Roseman, Vice President of Archipelago Learning



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