Behavioral-Based Reference Check Guidelines

Behavioral-based questions can be asked of an applicant’s former employer or colleague. It is important to be prepared with questions before calling a reference and to listen carefully for what is and isn’t said in response to specific questions. Remember to always start by telling the reference:

- Your name
- The name of the organization, the name of the applicant, and the job title of the position the applicant applied for
- The applicant authorized you to inquire about his/her previous employment and to call former supervisors, including this reference
- The conversation will probably take about 30 minutes (if now is not convenient, schedule a time to call back)
- The information will be kept confidential and not shared with the applicant

Following is a variety of categories of possible behavioral-based interview questions that can be explored. This list is not exhaustive and can be discussed with your recruiter.

**Work Ethic**
Describe a time when [Name of Applicant] went above and beyond the call of duty.

**Service Orientation**
Describe a situation where [Name of Applicant] provided exceptional customer service. What made it stand out? What characteristics did [Name of Applicant] exhibit that made this encounter notable?

**Communication**
Tell me about how [Name of Applicant] communicates with others concerning project process, concerns, and suggestions. How would you describe [Name of Applicant’s] communication style? Please provide an example of its effectiveness.

How does [Name of Applicant] communicate with people at different levels?

**Self-Management**
Describe how [Name of Applicant] works under pressure. Does he/she anticipate problems effectively or does he/she just react to them? Can you provide an example?

Tell me about a time that [Name of Applicant] was given inadequate resources to get a job done. How did he/she manage to complete the job?

Tell me about a team project that [Name of Applicant] was involved. What did he/she do to ensure the success of the team? Were there any problems?
Has [Name of Applicant] ever served on an organization-wide committee or working group? If yes, please explain the position and the duties.

Please describe how [Name of Applicant] managed his/her professional growth and development.

**Interpersonal Skills**
Tell me about a conflict [Name of Applicant] had with another employee. How did he/she resolve the conflict? How did he/she work towards mending the relationship with that person?

Describe the types of people [Name of Applicant] gets along with best and why.

Describe the types of people [Name of Applicant] has difficulty getting along with and why.

Tell me about [Name of Applicant]’s relationship with a co-worker who he/she does not have a good working relationship. What steps has he/she taken to improve that relationship?

Describe [Name of Applicant]’s relationship with the people he/she worked/works with.

**Accountability**
Describe a complex problem [Name of Applicant] solved.

Tell me about a time [Name of Applicant] had to take responsibility for a mistake he/she made.

How does [Name of Applicant] show commitment to your organization?

Describe a project in which [Name of Applicant] failed. What did he/she learn from this?

**Leadership Skills**
Describe a situation when [Name of Applicant] demonstrated initiative and took action without waiting for direction. What was the outcome?

Describe a time when [Name of Applicant] had to make or implement a difficult decision that one or more people didn’t like. How did he/she handle it? How did he/she handle their displeasure?

Tell me about a time when [Name of Applicant] was given a deadline which could not possibly be met. How did he/she handle it?

Describe a situation where [Name of Applicant] had been under pressure in which you feel he/she handled it well.

Describe a situation in which [Name of Applicant] had to quickly establish his/her credibility and gain the confidence of others. What did he/she do?

How would you characterize [Name of Applicant]’s leadership and use of authority?

**Working with Others**
What has [Name of Applicant] done in the past to build rapport and relationships with people?
Give me an example of [Name of Applicant]’s ability to communicate effectively and build relationships with people regardless of cultural differences.

Describe a situation where the team was having trouble agreeing on a decision and what [Name of Applicant] did to facilitate consensus.

What role did [Name of Applicant] take in a group situation?

What would [Name of Applicant] do if some team members weren’t doing their share of the work?

How would [Name of Applicant] handle a hostile co-worker?

Adaptability/Flexibility
Tell me about a change that has occurred in [Name of Applicant]’s workplace. How did he/she cope with those changes? What did he/she do to facilitate those changes?

Results Oriented
Please provide an example when [Name of Applicant] took a risk to achieve a goal.

In relation to others, how would you grade him/her on taking initiative?

What organizational techniques has [Name of Applicant] used to manage his/her workload?

Describe how [Name of Applicant]’s ability to communicate effectively and build relationships with many different types of people has contributed to the organization’s success.

Give me an example of when [Name of Applicant] achieved something by his/her persistence that others couldn’t.

Give me an example of a situation when [Name of Applicant] has demonstrated sensitivity to diversity issues.

Describe how [Name of Applicant] mentors others.

Resource Management
What has [Name of Applicant] done in the past that demonstrates his/her commitment to continuous improvement?

How does [Name of Applicant] delegate responsibility?