



Genius Files #6 – Behavioral Interviewing for the Job Seeker

By

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Let's face it. Whether you are looking to become the next VP of Marketing at Thecompany.com, or the newest programmer at your dream computer company, interviewing for any new job pretty much stinks. Sure, it can be an exciting time, but the actual interview itself is stressful, awkward and usually something you would rather just avoid.

We all approach looking for work with a weird mix of excitement and anxiety. It is a challenge that leaves us feeling not quite in control of the result. Why, because we're not in control because ultimately the decision to hire *is* in the hands of others. But, that doesn't mean you can't have some control as well.

There are certain truths about every interview. First, you will always be the novice in an interview. The person doing the interview may come off as a "good old boy" who isn't very good at these "interview things", but rest assured they know more about how to interview you than you do about how to be interviewed.

Second, recent research on over 40,000 workers reveals that you are naturally at a disadvantage in the interview process. According to a 2004-2005 study, the

average person is only 59% accurate at assessing their own strengths and weaknesses but is 89% accurate when it comes to understanding the abilities of others.

Finally, a recent poll of 1,300 hiring managers showed that level or preparation for the actual interview is now just as significant as are your history, resume and experience combined. What constitutes preparation, however, has changed. It doesn't just mean a clean resume and well pressed suit anymore. As companies become more sophisticated in their hiring techniques more emphasis is being placed on qualifying a candidate's "soft skills" (e.g., thinking styles, natural talents, attitudes, etc.). If today's employers are paying more attention to your soft skills, you should be too.

Behavioral Interviewing 101

One of those important soft skills is understanding how to communicate with the interviewer. How you present information may completely resonate with certain styles and completely alienate others. The trick is to be able to understand which kind of behavioral style your interviewer has, then tailor your communications to that style.

According to one of the most accepted behavioral theory in the world, created by Harvard researcher William Marston, there are four primary types of behavior: Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness and Compliance. This DISC Behavioral theory argues that each of us has all four of these dimensions, but we also each develop our own unique preference for using them - our own behavioral style.

Here's a short course on how to identify the behavioral style of your interviewer and how that affects your interview with them.

Dominance (D):

High D's tend to be direct, driven & decisive. D's are strong-minded, strong-willed people who enjoy challenges, taking action, and immediate results. Their focus tends to be on the bottom line. Dominance is summarized as the factor of control. High D's tend to focus on the need to achieve and maintain a measure of authority and power. Competitiveness and ambition are also associated with the D factor. Indeed, they seem to enjoy challenge, and rarely back away from a difficult or risky situation. Dominant individuals are not naturally trusting of others - they will seek to attain success on their own merits, without asking for or expecting help or support from those around them. Should a situation arise where the assistance of others is an unavoidable necessity, they will tend to issue orders directly, rather than asking for cooperation.

Influencing (I):

High I's tend to be influential, social, optimistic & outgoing. High I's are "people people" who prefer participating on teams, sharing ideas, and entertaining and energizing others. Influence is associated with a sunny, friendly and extrovert approach, warm and open to other people, sociable and gregarious. As you might expect, high-I's' often possess well-developed social skills and an urge to meet and talk with other people. The hardest thing for a High-I to accept is rejection. They need to interact positively with those around them, and their friendly, open style usually helps them to maintain relations of this kind. Their desire to be open with other people can lead them at times to reveal information or express feelings that more staid types might prefer to keep hidden. For this reason, they are sometimes seen as lacking in tact. Nonetheless, their natural communicative abilities often permit them to talk themselves out of any difficult situation resulting from their lack of diplomacy.

Steadiness (S):

High S's tend to be steady, stable, sympathetic & cooperative. S's tend to be helpful and team players. They prefer being behind the scene, working in consistent and predictable ways. They are often good listeners. As its name suggests, those who show a high level of Steadiness take a measured, steady approach to life. They are patient and undemanding, often showing sympathy for and loyalty to those around them. It is more common to find this dimension accompanied by high Compliance. High-S's are resistant to change, and will prefer to settle into a predictable and constant environment. They have an intrinsically passive approach, and work best when given clear instructions and a high level of support. Because of this, they avoid conflict or confrontation if at all possible, and will instead seek to adopt the role of peacemaker if a dispute should break out.

Compliance (C):

High C's tend to be compliant, conscientious, concerned, cautious & correct. C's usually focus on quality. They plan ahead, constantly check for accuracy, and seek systematic approaches. It is the factor of structure, detail and fact, and those displaying high levels are interested in precision and accuracy. Because they are naturally passive and reticent to speak out unless called on by others, it is often imagined that High-C's are lacking in ambition. In fact, this is not the case - in this specific sense, they are similar to highly Dominant individuals in their desire for control their environment. Because of their passive style, however, they will try to achieve this control using structure and procedure, insisting on rules and defined codes of conduct to achieve their ends.

These are the four core dimensions. Next, you need to know how to read your interviewer to determine which of these is their primary style. By understanding this, you will be able to communicate with them in the way they prefer. This will increase their receptivity, make them listen more to what you have to say, and create some camaraderie which will only help your cause.

The High D

In an interview, high D's are usually:

- Straight forward and up front
- Confident, secure and comfortable speaking out
- Unafraid to confront difficult issues or ask sensitive questions
- Not big believers in lots of data or specifics
- In charge, controlling the process with confidence and a purpose
- Looking for signs of competitiveness, which they value
- Aggressive
- Hurried or impatient
- Easily distracted
- In a rush

The High I

In an interview high I's are usually:

- Very talkative
- Sunny
- Open
- Energetic
- Very social and expressive
- Seeking approval
- Skilled in communicating with others
- Smooth, good talkers
- Likely to talk more than they listen

The High S

In an interview, high S's are usually:

- More quiet than D's and I's
- Softer
- Less confident, more reserved
- Slow or unhurried, steady
- Patient or willing to listen
- Have a system they like to follow

The High C

In an interview, high C's are usually:

- Very deliberate
- Exacting
- Very specific
- Interested in lots of detail
- Quiet and reserved, perhaps even timid
- "Perfectionistic" or very accurate
- Analytical
- Methodical

In the first 5-10 minutes of an interview, pay specific attention to how your interviewer acts. Even before you meet them, you can watch their behavior. After you meet them, pay attention to how fast they jump right into the questions. Figuring out your interviewer's behavioral style is only half the picture. Once you know that, then you have to deliver information in a way that is appropriate to their style. Learning to communicate with them in their language will help make your interview even better.

When interviewing with high D's:

- Get straight to the point, don't mess around with fluff and social formalities
- Have a sense of urgency, they are usually in a rush
- Don't challenge them, but be confident and competitive
- Show competitiveness
- exhibit a real "go get 'em" attitude, but not over the top because high D's don't like flamboyance
- keep it simple
- be practical, demonstrate how you get results, or have won competitions
- Talk business because high D's usually prefer professional relationships
- Demonstrate that you can lead and take command

When interviewing with high I's:

- be social, sunny and happy
- feel free to talk, but not more than they do
- discuss the interviewer and make it personal
- feel free to lighten things up
- focus on your ability to communicate with others and understand them
- show them that you understand people and have diplomacy
- respect others if you talk about why you left
- if you are seeking a new job because you didn't get along with others it won't hurt to let the high I know this

When interviewing with a high S:

- be calm, reserved and don't get too emotional
- be kind and show respect to everyone you talk about
- show them how dependable and consistent you are
- if you are someone who takes a slow, steady approach and can always be depended on to stick with it to the end, high S's will appreciate this a lot
- don't challenge authority

When interviewing with a high C:

- provide lots of detail and supportive evidence for what you say
- don't skimp on the specifics
- show your methodical side, if you have one
- demonstrate how accurate you can be
- talk about rules, structure and systems in a supportive way (e.g., bosses, company rules, laws, etc.)
- feel free to get analytical

Knowing the interviewer's behavioral style will help you highlight your strengths appropriately. This is one of the keys to successful interviewing because regardless of how much experience you have, how good your resume looks or how successful you have been in the past, if you can't communicate all of those wonderful things to the interviewer in the right way, it's a moot point.

The Genius Files is a series of educational articles crafted from lessons learned in the recently concluded Genius Project (a seven-year, 197,000, twenty-three country study of what drives individual excellence in the new knowledge worker economy).

The Genius Project is the foundational research behind the latest book from Innermetrix Inc Founder and CEO Jay Niblick titled, *What's Your Genius – How the Best Think for Success*.

To view the entire Genius series, or to learn more about how you can unleash your own genius, please visit <http://www.whatsyourgenius.com>.