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BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS REQUIRE NEW APPROACH BY CANDIDATES

(Richmond, VA.) - As the staffing of companies has become harder in an era of record low unemployment, the cost of choosing the wrong candidate for a managerial or sales job is estimated by some employers at three times the annualized salary of an employee who leaves before a year is out. This doesn't even begin to factor in the cost of having the position effectively vacant until a productive individual can be found.

As a result, a new interviewing technique, which is a better predictor of performance in a job is starting to find its way into many companies nationally. In the Richmond, Virginia area in particular, this technique is steadily increasing in popularity, according to Jay Schwartz, President of the Richmond office of Management Recruiters International, Inc. (MRI), the world's largest search and recruitment organization. Candidates who are unaware of how the technique works may be at a decided disadvantage in an interview to those who do.

Called Behavioral Interviewing, the technique seeks to evaluate everything about a candidate through assessment of specific actions or behaviors in given circumstances or jobs. In addition to eliciting general knowledge or expertise from a candidate, interviewers using the technique encourage candidates to recount in detail job situations and the results of specific actions, even for seemingly minor tasks on previous jobs.

"It's actually very effective," said Schwartz, whose company trains its recruiters and clients in how to use the technique. "But candidates who are prepared to answer questions in the appropriate way have an advantage over candidates who are blindsided by it and must be coaxed by the interviewer to respond appropriately. It's not that you can 'beat the test' by understanding it beforehand. It's more a question of making the interview go a little better by knowing what's required of you."

Schwartz notes that there are some easy clues to recognize when one is in a behavioral interview and some strategies to keep in mind.

- 1) Behavioral interviews often begin with a statement that the interviewer will be looking for specific instances from real situations in answer to his questions, and not to be nervous if it takes the candidate a few minutes to gather his thoughts and memories to answer.
- 2) The questions will often begin with words to the effect of "tell me about a specific situation in which you...."
- 3) When the candidate wanders towards generalities, the interviewer will often coax the candidate back to specific examples, asking for the names of people, their titles and other concrete details. Often the interviewer will rephrase a question so it sounds different but elicits the same information.

According to Schwartz there are some easy ways to prepare for such an interview:

- 1) Decide what your chief skills or strengths are and fix in your mind actual experiences, which exemplifies each. Be sure to recall or remind yourself of dates, names, quantities or measurements of success and other details that will convey the reality to the interviewer.

2) Understand the job description for which you are interviewing and be prepared to recall specific actions and behaviors, which address the skills, needed in the position.

3) Specificity is more important than vague proclamations of your skills. Small but telling actions and behaviors are more important than grandiose but unsubstantiated claims of job success. No one expects you to have single handedly saved the world, the company and your immediate boss from sure ruination. They simply hope that you're the one who can effectively do the job they're hiring for.

"The idea behind behavioral interviewing is that you can tell much more about a person's attitudes, work habits, and skills by hearing them describe real actions taken in real circumstances than by letting them speak in the abstract about themselves," summed up Schwartz. "It's amazingly effective, I think, because each of us reveals our motivations and attitudes whenever we recount our part in human interaction. Motivation and attitude are huge success factors in a new job."

Management Recruiters International, Inc., (www.brilliantpeople.com) is the world's largest search and recruitment organization with more than 750 offices worldwide. Based in Cleveland, MRI has billings in excess of \$400 million and places 30,000 people in jobs annually. MRI is a subsidiary of Philadelphia-based CDI Corp. (NYSE: CDI). CDI increases the productivity and competitiveness of its Fortune 1000 customer base through customized technical, information technology, professional and administrative staffing and outsourcing solutions. CDI revenues totaled \$1.5 billion in 1998.

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