

CRITICAL INCIDENT INTERVIEW

The best prophet of the future is the past

In a critical incident interview, recruiters ask about the behaviour of applicants in past situations. On one hand, the job interview is about testing the relevant experience and hard skills of applicants. On the other hand, recruiters want to find out whether they have the required soft skills (strengths). They would like to observe the applicants at work for the test. One way to do this is the critical incident interview. As a preparation, the interviewer asks questions to superiors and job holders to determine positive and negative behaviour in typical situations of the job. In the interview, they ask the applicants about similar experiences in their professional life. So, the actual behaviour shown is of interest. This avoids that applicants refer to textbook knowledge or socially desirable behaviour when answering. The critical incident interview is a structured interview and achieves a good validity.

The critical incident interview requires good preparation

For applicants, this interview form is demanding and requires good preparation. They proceed in a similar way to the interviewers. First, they make a job analysis. Then they consider situations that are critical to success. For a management position, this could be a difficult performance review. The job advertisement usually does not describe concrete situations. Rather, it says that candidates must be strong leaders. Then the applicants look for corresponding experiences in their past. The most important part is the processing of these experiences in the form of stories (storytelling). When applicants tell stories about problems they have overcome, recruiters can observe their behaviour with the mind's eye. And that is the goal of the critical incident interview. Most applicants have not prepared their stories or tell them unstructured. Therefore, interviewers use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to ask questions until the story is comprehensible.