

Companies Grill Candidates on Real-life Situations

Recruiters veer from usual line of questioning

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"So, tell me about yourself." Interview candidates are no longer intimidated by this opening line. If anything, it's the interviewer who's wary. To call candidates' bluff, companies are now working out new interviewing techniques at the time of selecting candidates. Beyond work and role, queries now relate to problem-solving and ask for evidence.

Says Manish Kumar, president, human resources & CSR, Dhanlaxmi Bank. "The maximum challenge is at the mid- and senior-level recruitments as they are intelligent, experienced in giving interviews and know how to cover up. That's where the role of a seasoned recruiter becomes critical."

Most of the candidates are well-prepared, says Nikul Shah, president, global HR and corporate services, Omnitech InfoSolutions. "Their answers are stereotypes and theoretically very good. Only when we grill them on real-life situations are they exposed," he says.

Hiring is no longer a set formula, and recruiters have taken on the role of investigators. "We focus on a comprehensive process that includes competence-based interviewing and assessment testing, coupled with pre-screening, background and reference checks," says Surbhi Shweta, head, human resources, Mirae Asset Global Investments (India).



We ask manager-aspirants for examples of how they handled a low performer

APARNA BALLAKUR, VP, HR, Yahoo! India

I move away from job details & dive into the ambitions, passions & goals of candidates



ALOK KEJRIWAL, CEO, Games2Win



Only when we grill them on real-life situations are candidates exposed

NIKUL SHAH, President, Global HR, Omnitech Solutions

A candidate may be prepared, but can't always be right during behavioural interviewing



SUDAKSHINA BHATTACHARYA, HR Head, IL&FS Financial Services

Companies used last year's slow-down to take a close look at all their processes, including hiring, says Bala Mahadevan, CEO-India, Orange Business Service, a global communications service provider. "Earlier, as long as the candidate was billable, he was absorbed. Now, most companies focus on what value he can bring in."

Organisations no longer want people who have mastered their theories; they would rather have real people who have suffered failures and worked on them. Candidates can no longer make generic statements like they are 'analytical' or 'team players' and expect to be hired. Says Sudakshina Bhattacharya, HR head, IL&FS Financial Services, "Our questioning is such that the candidate cannot bluff; he has to represent facts and give very specific answers."

Interviewers have begun to probe deeper into the candidate's personality and move beyond the 'strengths-and-weaknesses' line of questioning. Multiple interviews, pre-employment testing, scenario and behaviour-based questioning are increasingly used to zero in on the right candidate.

Yahoo!, which mostly recruits technical staff, uses puzzles and real-life situations during interviews. IT companies Omnitech InfoSolutions and Nihilent Technologies ask candidates to deliver a presentation to a group, often openly hostile. AEGON Religare often visits the homes of potential employees, while ICICI Prudential Life Insurance tells them the hard truths to check motivation levels.

IL&FS Financial Services prefers giving pre-placement offers to interns whose style of working and capabilities it has already seen on the job, while Ambit Group presents drafted scenarios to

freshers to judge how they would work in such conditions.

Nihilent Technologies observes candidates' behaviour closely. "We need certain skills in people; we can train them in technology, but cannot teach human evolution. So we observe how they speak, eat, sit, communicate; we look for listening skills, humility, willingness to explain; we tell them to present before a nasty group and see how they behave. We ask them to draw diagrams and explain, or write a letter," says Ravi Teja, senior associate vice president and country manager, India.

The company also looks for people passionate about non-work related pursuits, like music, social work and sports. "We believe professional and personal lives have to come together, because a person can only perform well at the job if he is happy in his personal life," says Teja.

When candidates come well-prepared, the quality of the interview and its outcome depend on the interviewer's skills, says Aparna Ballakur, vice president, HR, Yahoo!. She once asked a manager-aspirant an example of how he handled a low performer. "People are not prepared for such questions," she says.

There are times when interviewers take a completely different line of questioning. Alok Kejriwal, entrepreneur and co-founder of Games2Win, strays away from job details and dives into the ambitions, habits, passions and goals of candidates. "I hire 99.99% on gut and intuition -- never by credentials," he says.