



What Are Interview Assessment Days All About?



Christine Ware - The Career Doctor

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Congratulations - if you've got this far in the recruitment process!!

Although you may be pleased with your efforts so far, the mere mention of an assessment day may be making you apprehensive!

So what are they looking for when they hold these assessment days?

I've run many in my days as a former HR Manager and I thought it might be good to share some insider secrets. Employers may be looking for different things than what you initially think!

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Games/Challenges

Some employers may choose to do a 'challenge' type of scenario (sometimes based on a survival exercise or similar game). This usually takes the form that they are leaving you in the desert with 5 objects and they tell you the object of your challenge is to all get back to HQ safely, using the 5 objects.

There are no real right or wrong answers here, and it doesn't matter if there was, as they are looking for different things than just getting back to HQ! Your team will probably be between 5-9 other applicants (any more and it is difficult for the observers to watch and listen carefully). Yes, you will be observed and listened to!!

They may be looking for these sorts of qualities:

1. How persuasive you are in a group (and do people listen to you).
2. How mindful you are of others and their opinions (especially if they are different to yours).
3. Who is keeping time in the group (you will be given a specific amount of time for this exercise).
4. Who gives up and goes quiet/doesn't contribute.
5. Who are leaders or clear team players?

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6. Who have creative streaks?

7. Who have the right attributes who would fit in well with the company values? You may well be an excellent candidate, but the wrong fit for the company.

8. Who listens carefully.

9. Who plans carefully.

10. Who is good at presenting findings on behalf of the group (can they say it concisely, without rambling/waffle)? Think of the TV series 'The Apprentice' here; and some of the cringe-worthy candidates they have had on there, who we would be desperate NOT to employ!

In-Tray Exercises

Other exercises that I've prepared for assessment days are the in-tray exercise. You are given a list of tasks and you need to show how you would prioritise them if this was a typical working day). Of course, I always made it a bit more challenging by throwing in a curved-ball half way through, to see how they reacted).

On-Line Assessments

Some candidates have also been faced with an online assessment test which normally consists of multiple choice questions. Again to be completed within a set amount of time. If you are going for a mechanical/engineering post it may well have those sorts of questions in there too.

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Lunch/Coffee Breaks

Don't think you are off the hook in these scenarios. In my days I would be watching how you interacted/networked with others socially and whether you just 'turn it on' when the cameras are rolling! My secretary also observed for me too as the candidates arrived and got booked in and her observations were invaluable!

Interviews

The 1-1 interview, which sometimes takes place on the same day too. They may have questions about how you felt you performed during the day and there will always be a 'bank' of questions which they have previously prepared to ask every candidate (as you all get an equal chance), and no-one gets more of a tough interview than others.

Presentations

I have also given my candidates 15 mins to prepare a presentation topic that they will know about when I tell them. They are then given 10 minutes to do a presentation to a small panel audience. What was I looking for here?

1. Ability to think on your feet on a topic.
2. Keep to strict timescales.
3. Presence and confidence.

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4. Engagement with the audience.

5. Persuasion and articulation.

6. Whole delivery and flow in terms of body language, tonality, the speed of voice etc.

7. **HOT TIP:** It really doesn't matter how right/wrong your answer was, it's the way you present the skills that I was judging, that I'd mark you on.

Role-Plays

I'm not a fan of role-plays, but I know some organisations still use them. It may be useful for them to observe you in a situation which you can't plan for. I.e. coming face to face with an angry customer and how you dealt with them. Do you inflame the situation by what you say? Or calm it right down? Either way, you will be thinking on your feet and judged on not only what comes out of your mouth, but your body language, how you try to defuse the situation, whether you can get to a solution and move things forward. Ideally, you are looking for a win-win outcome here!

So, the next time you are invited to an assessment day, embrace it fully.

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They want to get the right fit for their organisation and by having you with them for a day, they are more likely to see 'the real you'. This also has advantages for you too, as you can get into the culture of the organisation and make sure it is the right fit for you too!

As always, if you have any specific questions, please don't hesitate to ask me!

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