

# Surviving the Assessment Centre

Being invited to an assessment centre can be a daunting prospect. There are many urban myths about the type of exercises you might face and how the assessors reach their decisions.

An assessment centre is a series of structured, timed, exercises which are designed to simulate the kind of activities you would be doing in the job itself. As well as interviews, these could include

- Presentations (Individual or Group)
- Role Plays
- Group discussions and tasks
- Written case studies
- Psychometric tests of aptitude and/or personality
- Social and networking events

The aim of the assessment centre is to be as objective and scientific as possible in evaluating candidates' potential. This means that

- You will be assessed by several people over the course of the day, in order to reduce bias.
- The assessors will be trained to document everything you do and say in order to evaluate you against a pre-agreed framework of competencies.
- You are usually scored numerically against each of the competencies.
- Each competency is assessed across a number of exercises. Your scores for each competency are then reviewed by the panel and a decision taken whether to hire

Here's how to ace the assessment centre:

## Prepare In Advance

Research the organisation and job as you would for a normal interview. Make sure you are familiar with the competencies for the job. In addition you should

- Think about how you are going to introduce yourself to staff and other candidates in the introductory session and during social activities. This is your 'elevator pitch' and needs to be polished.
- You may be asked to deliver a short impromptu presentation on a familiar topic (common ones are The Best Day of My Life or My Favourite Hobby). Preparing a few ideas in advance can reduce stress.
- If you are given a presentation to prepare, make sure your timings work. Prepare a few extra slides/points and a few you could take out in case you run over or under time.

## Keep It Simple

When asked to deliver a presentation or participate in a group exercise, the assessors are evaluating your general approach, communication and organisation skills. They are more interested in the process than the subject matter. So don't get drawn into too much detail or agonise about the right answer to a problem. Stick to delivering a few key points well.

## **Listen and Co-operate**

Being open to the views of others, demonstrating listening skills through your body language, seeking to build consensus and helping the group focus on the task in hand are more effective ways to show leadership than coming up with lots of ideas or issuing instructions to others. Avoid the temptation to argue with, criticise or interrupt others at all costs. Standing up for your views in a diplomatic way is your aim.

## **Participate enthusiastically**

Employers often comment that successful candidates are those who are ready to have a go at any exercise, who show genuine interest in fellow candidates and who participate actively in discussions. Try to enjoy the assessment centre as an experience in itself which will enhance your self knowledge, regardless of the outcome. Your enthusiasm will shine through.

## **Be Yourself**

Let your natural personality show. Don't try to second guess the sort of person you think the employer wants. It's impossible to keep this up over an extended period and your behaviour will appear unconvincing. And you risk being placed in a job for which you are unsuited.

## **Ask For Feedback**

Whatever the outcome of the assessment centre, ask your assessors for feedback soon after you hear their decision. This can pinpoint where you might want to improve when preparing for your next Assessment centre.