

Pull together

Teamwork is an essential part of everyday working life and it is therefore one of the main competencies used to assess potential candidates, explains **Janet Cowell**



A CIPD survey in 2007 found that 47 per cent of employers had used assessment centres or team events as a method to select applicants. An assessment centre will test the candidates on a wide range of work-related activities in a group environment. But, how can a candidate demonstrate that they can do the job when they have to work with a whole bunch of people they have never met – let alone worked with before?

Team events do not simply stop at the recruitment process. Team building events are organised by companies so that colleagues have an opportunity to learn more about how they function as part of a team. A team event will also show how much a colleague is willing to learn about and value each other's differences and contributions. So teamwork is important to get the job – and to ensure that you remain effective when you do.

Preparing for a group assessment events are very much about how you react to people and situations so there is a limit to how much you can prepare. You can find out which competencies are being used to assess the candidates and ensure that you demonstrate those behaviours on the day. For instance, a group exercise is

likely to have teamwork as competency. The definition will make it clear but ensure that you start the day with the right state of mind: be receptive and open to change and be interested in learning other people's points of view. Not only during the exercises but in the down time as well – at lunch, by the coffee machine – before and after events. Make the effort to get to know the other candidates at your assessment event as they could be your future peer group.

Using your skills

Being a good team member requires listening, sharing, co-operating and encouraging others. The aim is to ensure that you are proactive in getting tasks done by collaboration and discussion – rather than being dominant and over-bearing. Not all assessment events are looking for leaders – it will be clear in the information sent about the event if being a leader is required. Generally, it is not the case, so be willing to take in new ideas and collaborate to find ways to get the task completed.

Handling conflict

Working with people you have never worked with before – in a pressurised situation – can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. The aim should be to confront the problem – not the individual.

Try to avoid the 'I'm right and you're wrong' standoff. Allow those involved to express their opinion and try to reach a collaborative solution. Bring in the other members of the team so that you do not get into a 'me versus you' situation. Conflicts will occur throughout your working life so it is best to learn how to deal with them effectively. If things do not go well – recognise what you could have done differently and ensure that you do.

End result

You may believe that the only good result is to get the job. This can be the case but getting some constructive feedback can also be a good result. Be proactive and accept any criticism in the spirit of aiding your personal development. Team events give you the opportunity to learn more about yourself and from the feedback you can set yourself goals. Teamwork is important for now – and for the future. ■

Janet Cowell is a Director of Resourcing Matters Limited resourcingmatters.com, who will be running the Mock Assessment Centres at the National Graduate Recruitment Exhibitions, which will include a group exercise. For more information visit 1st-step.co.uk