

The Bumpy Ride of Interview

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In this era of globalization & knowledge economy, HR needs to assume the role of strategic business partner not just by words but by deeds. Recruitment & selection are frontline strategic HR functions for an organization. They serve as important indicators to the organization doorway. The reputation of the organization takes a U turn when the approach adopted is dysfunctional. The following case study aptly describes the agony of a candidate for whom the interview process is a far from perfect experience.

Key words: recruitment, selection, interview

THE BEGINNING

Devang Shah was a middle aged person working with one of the niche retail organizations of the country Organosys. Organosys was an India based retail organization primarily into FMCG. The company in the recent years also explored the markets of United State of America & Europe on a successful note.

Devang had completed his masters in Business Administration from a reputed management school of the country. During his days of post graduation he earned the reputation of excellent team player & that of great execution skills. Devang was initially selected through campus placement for a mid-sized service sector company named as Novel. Devang worked in Novel for the initial five years. Nevertheless he earned name & fame at Novel, but he did not find his job enriching in terms of career development opportunities. He therefore, thought of taking a plunge & subsequently joined Organosys, a leading retail organization of the country at the capacity of Marketing Manager.

He got posted at New Delhi for the initial couple of years. Devang justified his selection through impeccable performance record. This earned him laurels in the organization, consequently making him a darling of his bosses. After a successful stint of two years, he got posted at Agartala in the successive third year. Since his posting, he had to manage string of operational problems at Agartala.

While he was successful in resolving some but not all. Backed by an impressive track record, his bosses have great expectations from Devang. They were apparently quite surprised to find Devang out of from. They eventually started questioning his credibility & achievements.

Aghast at the treatment meted out, Devang thought of applying for other comparable capacities from the market. He was confident that there were enough players in the market that would pay him handsomely to leverage his experience & expertise in marketing.

Devang started searching newspapers, employment dailies, job portals for suitable prospects. Fortunately he found several recruitment aids related to various capacities namely Head Marketing, Head -Business Development, Director – Marketing. He took not time in applying for these posts. He even took the help of a professional service provider for making his resume more alluring. Eventually after applying he waited anxiously for interview calls from these organizations. Devang received an interview call from one of the organizations in which he had applied. The organization was one of the top most retail firms of the country. Devang was thrilled to receive a call from this firm.

The HR executive of the firm advised him to confirm his presence at the interview through a confirmatory mail, which he happily agreed to. However he received no communication from the organization in regard to the reimbursement of the travelling expenses. He had even flagged this issue in his email correspondence & tried to get across the HR representative through the mentioned cell nos. but in vain.

Loaded with heavy commitments to his present organization, Devang took the luxury of booking the tickets by economy class. On several occasions after that he tried to contact the HR for the day, date & schedule of the interview without any success.

Eventually he did receive a call from Mr. Ramanujan, HR executive working with the retail giant informing him about the date & schedule of the interview. The executive apologized to Devang for the delay in intimation citing excessive work load as a reason. Devang was flabbergasted albeit rather upset at the way a retail giant approached its interview process. He still decided to go ahead.

THE PLUNGE

On the day of the interview, Devang arrived at Mumbai by one of the earliest flights. As a safeguard, he had already referred to the exact address of the organization through the company's website. He hired an auto to reach the place of the interview. As he reached the company's corporate office, he found two security guards at the main entrance gate. They started

questioning Devang in a very rough manner. Devang still maintained his calm & tried to prove his identity through the interview letter he received from the organization. Subsequently he was allowed to enter the premises of the organization.

Devang anxiously entered the venue of the interview & started searching for Ramanujan who was coordinating the entire interview process. He even got shocked to see the hospitality arrangements a giant organization had made for the outstation candidates who turned for the interview process from far flung areas.

Here there was no representation from the organization that could make the candidates at ease, elaborate them on the length & breadth of the interview process & schedule. Devang was inundated in these thoughts, when he saw a perplexed Ramanujan yelling out his name. Ramanujan issued a badge to Devang & other candidates for appearing in the final interview process & requested all the candidates assemble at said place as the interview process would start within some short time duration. Devang did mind it at all as it would provide him an opportunity to relax & interact with other fellow candidates. However, it took him some time to find the washroom since there was no one around to facilitate & surprisingly no signboards either. Apparently, there were a lot of people who turned up, while some chatted with each other to ease their nerves; a few were busy with their laptops. Devang didn't mind conversing but it seemed to him that he stood out in some ways, as a small town fellow who didn't measure up to those around him in terms of sophisticated air or the cultivated American accent that some had. He now regretted his friend's advice to attend classes offered by some of the fancy finishing schools mushrooming in Agartala. Incidentally these schools taught everything from walking in a distinguishable style to even laughing in a manner to impress folks in the corporate world.

After about a wait of half an hour Ramanujan yet again turned up & requested the candidates to assemble in the said conference for Group Discussion. After Ramanujan was through with the preliminary preparations he invited the candidates & introduced the panelists to the candidates. Ramanujan took no time in announcing the topic of the Group Discussion along with the rules & regulations. The topic declared for the Group Discussion was Education & Employability. The Group Discussion lasted for about half an hour. To Devang's astonishment panelists invited for

the Group Discussion were least interested in how the candidates fared in the Group Discussion and the way it progressed.

However after the completion of the Group Discussion the candidates dispersed for a lunch break through a formal announcement made by Ramanujan. Immediately after half an hour Ramanujan hurriedly ushered the candidates into the interview room for the final interview, further announcing that it would be Devang who would be the first one to face the interview followed by other candidates. Devang got shock waves to see the organization's unorganized process of recruitment & selection. Here the HR had no communication & coordination with candidates, no definite sequence for the final interview round. Devang found himself wondering why in heavens he had made this trip.

Barely as he could come out of these thoughts, he saw his being announced twice by the lady sitting at the reception informing him to proceed to the interview as the panelists were waiting for the first candidate. Devang walked into the room & politely wished each before settling into a chair nearest closest to the interview table.

THE END

Mr. Dhawan, Director – Marketing, introduced himself & also introduced his fellow panelists, Ms. Mary Head HR & Mr. Makhan – Zonal Head for the Mumbai Region. Mr. Dhawan was trying hard not look unruffled over the arrangements since he had to shelve many last minute meetings thanks to interview. His good friend Mr. Makhan, has sounded him only a few days back & he could not turn down his request. Ms. Mary had a reputation of springing surprises & he was trying hard not to show his displeasure with the functioning of the HR department publicly. The HR team under Ms. Mary had continued their earlier role of pushing papers without being effective. There was the most the most uncoordinated department of the organization. There was no preplanning & everything was left for the last minute. The staffing team did not maintain any kind of coordination with the interviewers as well. The resume of the candidates were bombarded to the interviewers on the last minute without giving a second thought. Mary's assistant Ramanujan sent him not less than 100 resume, some of them from last

year's pool of applications. By the time the mess was sorted out Mr. Dhawan was on a flight from Delhi to Mumbai.

He now looked at Devang & had no clue about the young man's resume. To break the ice, Mr. Dhawan asked Devang, gently where he was from. Devang explained that he was recently posted at Agartala & by way of clarification added that he hailed from Gujarat. "Hmmm," said Mr. Dhawan, "so you are from Dhirubhai's land?" "Yes", said Devang half smiling. "But actually it is from Chorwad which is in South Gujarat we are from North Gujarat exclaimed Mr. Makhan, cleverly emphasizing the "chor" in the word & burst out laughing wildly. The others joined him & Devang tried hard to suppress his nervousness. Clearly the interview was not proceeding as desired. Fortunately, for him the group's laughing was interrupted by Ms. Mary's cell phone. The ringing tone she had set was based on a popular romantic song and since the sound was loud enough, the 2 gentlemen stopped to laugh and exchange winks at each other. Ms. Mary answered the phone and suggested to her co-panelists that it was an urgent matter and she had to attend it. As Ms. Mary left the room, Mr. Makhan and Mr. Dhawan resumed, looking at Devang resume with an air of seriousness. Mr. Makhan interrupted the heavy silence a few seconds later, by asking Devang a question. "If you were an animal or tree or some other random object, which one would you be?" he said half- teasingly. Mr. Makhan had recently read somewhere that such questions -strange as they may seem, reveal interesting insights about a person during an interview. He had no clue, though, as to how he would interpret Devang answer. Devang almost squirmed when he heard the question. As far as he was concerned this was a clear beamer and he thought he should be honest about it. "I don't understand your question," he confidently told Mr. Makhan. "Never mind, just think about something," replied Mr. Makhan."Ok, Sir, if you insist, I'd like to be a flower," said Devang Mr. Dhawan now joined the discussion - he was clearly enjoying his friend's puzzling question. They had not shared any notes before the interview but it seemed he should also pitch in. "But a flower comes with a shelf life, my friend, an expiry date," he said while winking at Mr. Makhan. "C'mon you have been in the retail industry for some time now - think something different and lasting," he added. Mr. Makhan felt overjoyed at his friend's analysis and appreciated his questioning with a vigorous nod of his head. Clearly, they had so much in common. Devang found it difficult to mix flowers and the retail metaphor but was

convinced he had got it horribly wrong. Just as he was about to mumble an explanation. Ms. Mary walked in waving her flashy cell and very loudly, declared, "Folks, it's almost lunch time! Mr. Makhan found it quite awkward on Mary's part to announce the obvious. He was looking forward to a sumptuous lunch but he never expected a public declaration of the same - not least, before a candidate."Of course, Mary!" he replied, "as soon as we are done with Mr. Devang "

Barely had Ms. Mary settled in her seat, Devang found himself wondering why in heavens he had made this trip. He couldn't believe he could have taken such a dumb step in his life. The interview was not proceeding as per expectations and he was worried he would only lose his temper if he continued to answer the pack of jokers who stared at him now. As far as he could see there were no questions on his education or experience and it was more than obvious, he would not stand a chance. His mind now ran over the expenses he had incurred and the prospect of it not being reimbursed at all. Besides, he had heard from his friend the other day while boarding the flight, that his superiors in Delhi were planning a surprise visit to Agartala. Worried for all about this he thought of rushing out of the interview room & reaching the airport.

QUESTIONS:

1. How according the interview process be better coordinated? Give some suggestions.
2. What kind of homework the candidate needs to undertake so that the interview turns to be smooth sailing exercise.