

Auditioning for leadership

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT V Pradeep Kumar offers 10 tips to succeed in a group discussion

Years ago, there was an unprecedented response to one of our walk-in advertisements for marketing executives. To short list candidates, we decided on a group discussion (GD). Within minutes of announcing the group discussion round, three seemingly good candidates simply disappeared!

This year, I was on a selection panel of a prestigious management institute having a group discussion round. A top performer in CAT walked in. But he failed to participate actively in the group discussion. Since he was a CAT topper, we short-listed him for the next round, which was the interview round. He fared miserably in this round as well.

A group discussion is a commonly-used technique to shortlist candidates for professional courses or campus placements by assessing overall personality. Yet, many people are apprehensive about a group discussion.

Here are some tips that could prove useful:

Personality assessment: The general requirement is to look for smart youngsters with quick thinking skills, people-orientation skills and team playing skills. For corporate placements, those who show initiative and leadership qualities easily stand out and are therefore preferred.

Well begun is half done: Most candidates are nervous and tense before the GD round. There's no reason to be worried as the evaluator of a group discussion usually chooses subjects such as sports, politics, business, and globalisation. Regular reading of newspapers and business magazines and watching news on television could prove very useful. A mock GD with friends will familiarise you with the process and enhance your self-confidence. Work on your body language and communication skills by practicing in front of a mirror.

He who strikes first, strikes twice: If a subject is familiar, gather your thoughts quickly and be the first speaker. Present your views convincingly, using appropriate body language. Initiate a debate by asking, 'What do all of you feel?' Or, 'Who would like to present their view?' Use the second question



SMART TALK Take a balanced view on the topic of discussion. Become a leader by summarising the group's opinion at the end of the group discussion.

when you are unsure of your views. Listen carefully to the first few speakers. Organise your thoughts, politely intervene and present your arguments in a logical manner. Take a balanced view of the subject which is under discussion. Become a leader by summarising the group's opinion at the end of the GD.

Simple guidelines

- Be formally dressed.
- Sit at the centre of the group.
- Initiate the discussion and maintain eye contact with everyone.
- Be a good listener and note down important points.
- A group discussion has a limited time-frame. James Mccay, who wrote on time management, said: "One good analogy is worth three hours of discussion". Examples and analogies will strengthen your argument and impress the evaluators.
- Moderate the group discussion and give the others a chance to speak.
- When others express your

views, it only strengthens your argument. When they finish, effectively intervene saying, "I agree with your view..." and present your views more convincingly.

■ Present your view confidently, even if there are many contrary views on the subject. Remember, your success depends on your communication and leadership skills.

■ In a charged environment, participants may get irritated and aggressive. Stay calm and focused to ensure the dignity of the proceedings.

■ Take the lead in concluding the debate and summarise the group's opinion.

One person can't make up a team, but he/ she can become the team's crucial ingredient. Remember, the art of communication is the language of leadership.

Every time you have to speak, you are auditioning for leadership. The art of communication is saying the right things (content), at the right time, in a right way (body language, tone and tenor).