

## **READY, STEADY, GO TEST**

The mere thought of a Psychometric assessment can cause a dramatic rise in blood pressure, get the heart racing and can send the calmest person running for the hills. However if you are mentally well prepared the mention of testing will not give you heart failure, but will ensure that you have a positive and meaningful test experience.

These days most companies are using psychometric assessments in their selection strategy to narrow down a long list of candidates to a chosen shortlist and ultimately to find the best candidate for the job. Assessments are also used to assist in identifying potential for development and career options. It helps the selectors to discover what individuals really can do as opposed to what they say they can do. Usually assessments take place after the first round of interviews but some companies are using them as an initial selection tool and then inviting shortlisted applicants in for panel interviews afterwards.

Most people have a fear of the unknown, so perhaps taking the mystery out of assessments will make you feel more positive towards them. There are various types of psychometric tests but they are generally classified into three types: Ability, aptitude and personality.

Ability tests are designed to assess how you reason logically with certain types of information such as verbal, numerical and diagrammatical. They usually have right and wrong answers and are timed. The aptitude tests examine how you are likely to perform in a specific job. Questions are asked around a specific job task or ability. They also have right and wrong answers and are also timed. Personality tests give the assessor a good idea of your current behaviour and temperament, for example whether you are a big picture thinker or someone who looks at the finer detail. They also test your ethics and values. There are no right or wrong answers in these tests and are generally not timed. Personality assessments are also often used for team building exercises.

As with any form of testing, thorough preparation is the key to success. Going through assessments can be both mentally and physically tiring and there are a few tips to ensure that you are well prepared. You need to get lots of sleep and nutrition to be mentally alert to perform at your best, so make sure you have a good night's rest before the assessment. Also have a good nutritious breakfast on the morning of the assessment, you don't want the embarrassment of a rumbling tum in the middle of a test.

Calmness is essential to a successful test result. Try not to panic, the psychometrist will give you lots of instructions and examples to do before the test actually starts, so you will know exactly what to do and how long it will take. Remember to take deep breaths which will help the blood to flow to the brain matter. If you don't understand something don't be afraid to ask.

Your mother was right, honesty is always the best policy. Usually your first answer is the correct one so be honest with yourself and don't try and manipulate the test. There are built in measures in each test that will pick up if you are trying to be dishonest.

It is very important to be constantly alert on the day. Remember that your behaviour and attitude is being constantly monitored and will be included in the overall assessment feedback.

Dress comfortably, you are never going to get through a 5 hour assessment wearing skin tight jeans and stilettos. You still want to make a good impression so dress smartly but comfortably, if you look good you tend to feel good.

Cast your mind back to school days when you had to sit in those dreaded exams and try and think how you felt if you had studied hard and knew all your work. You were probably positive, relaxed and confident and your results would ultimately reflect that. Unfortunately you cannot study for psychometric assessments but if you are well prepared in other ways then you will also feel confident and relaxed and will perform at your best.

Revise the job specification several times and make sure that you are familiar with the main competencies and job requirements that are required. Write out a bullet list and match them up with your skills and attributes. Think of your achievements and be able to illustrate your strengths and abilities if asked.

Research the company in detail and get to know the structure and where your job will fit into the organisation. Most companies have very good websites and are full of useful information. Also if it is a retail company go and visit a few of the stores and get a feel for the product, customer, store location, competitors. Try to remember key details about the history of the company, background, products and services.

Find out what the process will be on the day, will you be tested in a group or individually, who will sit in, how long the tests are expected to last and what the format of the tests will be. Also try to establish what the feedback process will be afterwards and how long you can expect for the results to come back to you. Ask if you can receive feedback on your results by the psychologist.

When you get there be sure to make a good first impression. Smile, shake hands and greet the HR person or psychometrist by name, ask a few questions about the process and what can be expected. Communicate well, speak clearly, reply to any questions concisely.

Don't worry if you struggle, you may find that you perform better on some tests than on others, and find yourself making silly mistakes. Don't dwell on these and worry about them, as this will cause you to be negative which may affect your overall performance. Put it behind you and focus on the next task. Some people get off to a slow start and very few will perform well on all the tests. The test battery is designed to cover all aspects of your functioning so you may score low on some and still get a good overall high score.

Be yourself and don't try and second guess what the company wants to hear or see. They would not have invited you for the assessment if they didn't think you were a suitable candidate, so the fact that you have made it this far is a positive sign in itself. Just be yourself and behave as you normally do and you will come across as relaxed and confident.

What happens next? Once you have had a few drinks and calmed down, ask for feedback. Even if you don't get the job, the experience of attending psychometric assessments is a growth experience in itself. Ask the company for feedback on your assessment results as this will give you valuable information about your strengths and your developmental areas.

Learn from the experience, summarise what you learnt and what you could have done better, and praise yourself on what you did well. Be honest with yourself and make decisions about how to address your developmental areas or knowledge gaps. Find out what skills you lack and then do some research on various courses you could attend. Once you have completed this exercise, go ahead and apply for the next job – chances are you will be successful.

