

Career Planning and Soft Skills

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ABSTRACT:

An attempt has been made in this paper to describe the details about competitive examinations and the following personality test including personal interview covering the criteria used. The Career planning is the first step the candidates have to do. Different ways of collecting career information include reading, talking and job shadowing. Strengthening reading comprehension is an important step in the process of preparing for examination. An attempt has been made to list the steps for this process. Communication skills both written and oral play a vital role in the process of selection. The author gives a detailed account of different types of communication skills and stresses the need for developing confidence by adequate preparation, knowledge of examination pattern and adoption good study process are important steps for success.

Key Words: Competitive examinations, Career information Career planning, Communication Skills, Reading Comprehension.

1. Introduction

Competitive examinations and interview aptitudes are meant to test overall personality and basic knowledge of candidates. While preparing for competitive exams one must be very careful and thorough with his or her preparations. Solving previous question papers is very good practice. This facilitates candidates to get acquainted with the structure, pattern and syllabus of the concerned examination. Thanks to Internet, one can have free access to previous question papers useful for this purpose. These types of exams are knowledge oriented and brain hammering. Hence proper preparation is a must, in order to crack open these examinations.

For facing the competitive exams a calm mind with confidence is a must, enabling the prospective candidates to concentrate in the preparation. While preparing for exams one should be very confident, which makes the things easier and sets the context. It is common experience that one needs to make multiple efforts to succeed in their efforts and accept the dictum "failure is the stepping stone of success". Many students undergo heavy stress during the preparations

and sometimes become nervous. It takes some time to get back to normalcy. A cool, stable and sharp mind is a must to understand the concepts clearly, further necessitating some anti stress therapies like meditation.

2. Career Planning is the First Step

- **Explore the career world:** The first step is to explore the career opportunities available world-wide. A comprehensive analysis of interests, values and skills for choosing the career of that suits ones personality most.
- **Self Assessment Inventory:** It is about gathering information about oneself in order to make an informed career decision. A comprehensive self assessment should include the following :
 - **Interests:** Interest inventories are the most frequently used instruments in career planning. Candidates need to follow a system of matching his or her interests with one or more of six types viz: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Then match these types with the available occupations.
 - **Values:** Values inventories focus on what the individual feels the most important aspects of work. Every person has values sets that need to be reflected in a job fulfilling and rewarding. If one doesn't take values into account when planning career, there is a good chance of disliking work later leading for failure. For example, someone who needs to have autonomy in his work would not be happy in a job where every action is decided by someone else.
 - **Personality:** Many personality inventories used in career planning are based standards. People of a particular personality type are better suited to certain careers. An example would be that an introvert would not do well in a career that required public speaking. However, personality alone shouldn't be used to predict whether one would succeed in a particular career. A personality inventory should be used in conjunction with other inventories, such as interests, values, and skills.
 - **Skills:** A skill is defined as the ability to perform an activity efficiently. The skills can be acquired through education, training and work experience or it could be the result of an ability that one has acquired over the years. While deciding career to pursue one has to take cognizance of the skill set one possesses and also enjoys the work concerned.

3. Exploring Career and Educational Options

Balasubramanian (2014) felt after spending some time in understanding one's strengths, interests, and values it is a good idea to investigate potential career fields and learn what various occupations actually entail. One may also want to investigate educational options as part of the process. (Balasubramanian, 2014).

➤ **Choosing the Career:**

The three main ways to gather information about career options include reading, talking, and doing.

➤ **Reading:** At a basic level one has to look for information available about the job description, educational background prescribed, skills needed, working conditions, current employment statistics, salary information and job outlook (future growth or decline in job opportunities)

➤ **Talking:** "Informational interviewing" is probably the best way to gather information about the world of prospective nature of work. One can gather information about the field, industry, or particular type of work that is not possible to get in a book. Getting the personal and realistic view will help to take a sound decision. It's a good idea to talk with as many people as possible to complete picture. One may inquire with friends, relatives, teachers, career counselors and members of professional associations for suitable guidance.

➤ **Doing:** Job shadowing, cooperative education, internships and volunteering are just a few of the ways to investigate a career that interests job seekers. Job Shadowing is an excellent way to test career goals by seeing "a day in the life" of a particular field or position. It is better to spend few hours, a day, or several days on-site literally "shadowing" a specific professional or a group of professionals. Apart from understanding the nature of work concerned, this provides a chance to talk with professionals who can give information about related positions, the organization and details of job market in a specific industry or geographic region. This opportunity could be further explored to get advice on strategies for pursuing a particular job or career path and to make connections - "get referrals" for people to contact about potential jobs, internships, or more job shadowing.

4. Strengthening Reading Comprehension:

- Analyze the time and place of reading - Reading or studying for several hours may lead for mental fatigue, a source of the problem. A nonconductive place may lead for distractions or interruptions resulting into waste of time as one may not be able to understand what he is reading.
- Rephrasing each paragraph in own words – This will help in understanding and remembering the concepts and further reading again and again easily.
- Read aloud sentences or sections that are particularly difficult - Reading out loud sometimes makes complicated material easier to understand.
- Reread difficult or complicated sections - At times, in fact, several readings are appropriate and necessary.
- Slow down reading rate - On occasion, simply reading slowly and carefully will provide the needed boost in comprehension.
- Turn headings into questions - Refer to these questions frequently and jot down or underline answers.
- Write a brief outline of major points - This will help the overall organization and progression of ideas.
- Highlight key ideas - After reading a section, go back and think about and highlight what is important. Highlighting forces one to sort out what is important, and this sorting process builds comprehension and recall.
- Write notes in the margins - Explain or rephrase difficult or complicated ideas or sections.
- Determine if one lacking in background knowledge or not - Comprehension is difficult, at times, and it is impossible, if one lacks essential, information that the writer assumes.

5. Communication Plays a Vital Role

In the era of globalization, communication plays a vital role in the smooth functioning of any organization; hence the need to impart communication skills to any graduate/ postgraduate assumes greater importance. Students need to improve standards in performing the communication tasks. Précis writing, Business Correspondence and Report Writing are major forms of written communication in the professional world. Verbal Ability, Functional Grammar and Usage are needed to take care of the mechanics of writing, which enhance the effectiveness of written communication. To acquire the oral communication skills students need

to participate in seminars Conferences, Group Discussions, Meetings, Interviews, Telephonic Conversations, etc.

5.1 Communication Skills:

All living creatures have developed their own means of communication. These means include the use of vocal noises, facial expressions or even body movements. Man/woman is the only living creature with highly developed and systematic means of communication. He/she is able to exploit a variety of techniques for the purpose of communication. These include vocal symbols, body movements as also facial expressions. The speech and of gestures coordinate to give meaning to human thought. Official communication is carried out through letters, telephone fax, e-mail and computers. About 70 to 80 percent of the total working time of a professional is spent in communication. It may be verbal or non verbal. The success of communication is measured in terms of not only the effective transmission of the message but also the achievement of the intended result.

5.2 Verbal Communication: When two or more persons interact with each other through conversation, they are said to be following the mode of verbal communication. Meetings, seminars, telephonic conversation, face to face interaction between two individuals can be cited as classic examples of verbal communication. The advantage of this communication is that we can get immediate feedback. A speaker at a conference can visualize without much difficulty the way his lecture is being received by the audience. One can, as well, adjust the tenor of her/ his communication. Oral communication varies according to person and also situation. A lawyer would be called 'insane' if he/she behaves in the same manner as he does in the courtroom.

5.3 Written Communication: It is the common mode of communication in the official situation. Much of the success depends on the ability to communicate efficiently through this mode. One can reproduce, multiply or store any information in this type of transaction. Immediate feedback, however, may not be possible through this type of communication.

5.4 Dyadic Communication: The term dyadic is derived from 'di' that means two. As such, dyadic communication takes place between two persons. It may be verbal or nonverbal, say informal conversation between husband and wife, two friends, two acquaintances at a party and so on. There are no hard and fast rules for this conversation. It is a routine one and is a part and parcel of our day today life. Formal dyadic conversation however demands artistry and can be acquired through practice. Some of the common forms of formal dyadic communication are face-

to-face conversation, telephonic conversation, interview, instruction and dictation.

5.5 Face to Face Conversation: Most of time face-to-face conversation takes place at home. This conversation does not require any official decorum. Conversation outside our home i.e. the one which we have at restaurants, parties, parks and even offices need not follow any rigid rule. However, if we keep in mind the following points, we may be labeled as a pleasant 'conversationalist'. Choose a topic that interests both the participants. Be courteous and cheerful. Remember that there is no such thing as uninteresting topic'.

6. Develop Confidence:

Adequate preparation boosts confidence. Confidence earns relaxed state of mind, required for serious preparation. Also there will be clarity in thinking and logical way of thought process. By reading, listening to lectures/speeches and participating in group discussions, we will get comprehensive information, facts, statistics and current trends and developments of the subject. Be creative by thinking reflectively, analyzing intellectually and contemplating on the core of the subject. In this process one can get new ideas and solutions to the problems. This will also facilitate one to be creative and writing the answers in his or her own way and style.

7. Study Process:

- Select good atmosphere for quiet reading;
- Consult libraries for reference sources: Use Standard Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Atlases, Gazetteers and Handbooks. Read current journals, magazines and reports for up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge;
- Develop skills in tracking internet information sources and downloading; and
- Make Notes: Points to be remembered and points are to be presented in the order of general to specific.

8. Know The Examination Pattern:

- Carefully go through the syllabus;
- Know the type of questions being asked;
- Know the type of answers expected and the duration of the examination;
- Solve previous question papers and refer question bank series;
- Take advice of experts and attend coaching classes; and

- By and large, General Knowledge, General Aptitude (Reasoning), Numerical Ability and Functional English are common to many career oriented examinations

9. Writing/Presentation Skills:

- What is needed in writing: Adequate information, systematic presentation and command over the language;
- Present contents under appropriate headings and sub-headings;
- There should be clarity in expression;
- Always answer to the point. Be precise but accurate, covering all the points;
- Aspects to be cultivated: Speed of writing, legible handwriting, free from grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, use of capital and small letters and punctuation marks, use of appropriate vocabulary; and
- Sentences have to be short and simple and, easy to understand.

10. Facing Interviews:

Know the objectives and functions of the organization/ Vision & Mission Statements.

- Be clear in your expression;
- While answering: maintain eye contact and smile;
- Be honest and sincere in your attempt; and
- Discipline is the most important aspect.

8. CONCLUSION:

Preparing for the competitive examinations is an art by itself. Career planning and preparation for competitive examinations needs consorted effort including, confidence building, strengthening reading comprehension and developing communication skills, both written and oral. Knowledge of examination pattern and adoption of planned study process play vital role towards success in achieving good ranking in competitive examinations.

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