

In a not-so-perfect world of tight deadlines and operational realities, the interview is a far from perfect experience for everyone connected with it.



By Sumeet Varghese

Deval Shah is a Marketing Manager at one of the fastest growing Retail establishment in India. With outlets in almost every metro and tier-1 city across India, this particular retail chain has an impressive presence across the country. Deval is an MBA from one of the reputed B-Schools in the country and has been with the firm for well over 7 years. In fact, he has hardly switched jobs since his campus placement. While Deval has served the firm in various locations, he is presently posted in Patna and looks after marketing related activities for the states of Bihar and UP. Since his posting Deval has had to manage a string of problems related to the firm's operations in Bihar. While he has been able to solve some of these, he has not been quite successful with several other problems. Interestingly, till his Bihar posting Deval had an impeccable and impressive track record of managing well. Unfortunately, his bosses in Delhi, who expected the same level of performance from him as before, found it rather odd to believe that Deval wasn't his usual form. Accordingly, they began to question his achievements and credibility. Aghast at the treatment meted out to him, Deval decided to apply for a comparable position elsewhere. He was confident there were enough players in the country that would pay handsomely to leverage his experience and profile

in marketing and began trying his luck with some of the latest entrants to the retail sector. He strongly believed that his knack for marketing combined with the insights he had into the sector, would give him a real edge over other candidates.

Fortunately, Deval found several advertisements in leading national dailies and online job boards for the posts of Marketing Manager, Marketing Director, Business Development Manager and Marketing Coordinator at some of the more famous retail establishments in the country. Excited at the prospect of being hired he applied at all those places, he was sure he would get through. Oddly, there was very little difference in the Job Descriptions of the various posts advertised, except for the names and logos of the various companies that advertised these jobs. Besides, since no contact numbers were provided, Deval found himself a bit helpless and puzzled. However, like many of his friends, he decided to send his resume along with a covering letter to the email address provided. He ensured each application was suitably tweaked to represent the title of the post he was applying for. Interestingly, many of his friends availed of a service offered by some of the online job boards to spruce up their resume. Since Deval had seen one of his friend's plain and simple resume transform into a very

CASE

Sumeet Varghese

Management Consultant



An independent Management Consultant with expertise in Organizational Development and Human Resource Management processes, Sumeet has been a published researcher, management faculty, trainer and consultant for over a decade serving a host of clients from the academic, business, government and the non-profit sector. He has designed various HRD Systems and championed a wide range of organizational interventions linked to Competency Management, Assessment & Development Centers, Employee Engagement Surveys, HRD Audit, and Leadership Development through 360 Degree Feedback. Earlier, Sumeet served as Senior Consultant and Associate Director at T.V. Rao Learning Systems supporting a range of consulting assignments for various clients in national and international locations.

case study

impressive one after his friend had registered for the service, he gladly went for it. Incidentally, the service provider even asked him to make some edits in case he wished to. However, since Deval was not quite in the know when it came to fancy expressions used to describe job-related performance, he assumed his now impressively-worded resume would draw a lot of eyeballs. And as a matter of fact, soon after submitting his newly-worded resume, Deval received a call from one of the best known retail firms in the country. The mail he received from the HR department at his firm advised him to appear for an interview at Mumbai in a week's time. Fortunately, this time, there were names and numbers he could contact in case he wished to. While Deval had confirmed his presence for the interview by mail and had received an acknowledgment in the regard, there was no communication with respect to his travel costs being reimbursed or not, though he had flagged the issue in his mail. Therefore, he called up all the numbers provided in the mail he had received. Oddly, his calls went unanswered. He tried repeatedly calling several times during the day but he was unable to get anybody on the line. Given his own heavy commitments on the job and the prospect of not receiving an encouraging reply from his senior in Delhi, to his asking for a 2-3 day leave, Deval took the liberty of booking himself an economy class ticket, that night. He had managed to get the cheapest tickets and he was sure the interviewing firm would reimburse him.

The next day, Deval couldn't focus on his job at the office. There was the thrill of facing an interview after many years and his mind ran through the preparations he had to make. A file containing all his transcripts and certificates was almost ready and there were some books and journals he had to refer to before he faced the interview. In order to ensure that he had a glitch-free trip to Mumbai and back, he even cooked up a story about an aunt who had suddenly taken ill and who needed him at her bedside. As the day of the interview approached, Deval grew all the more nervous. He was now pinning all his hopes on this interview since he had not heard from any of the other places he had applied at. Strangely, he had not even spoken to anyone at the interviewing firm yet. Worried he drafted another mail to inquire about the interview venue. This time he received a call from a certain Ramanujan who said he could refer the firm's website for the exact address. Ramanujan apologized for the delay in contacting Deval and explained that they had received a huge volume of applications for the various positions. Before Deval could confirm the timing, Ramanujan excused himself by saying he had to rush to an Interview Co-ordination Meeting organized by the HR department. He did receive a mail shortly from Ramanujan just before he started for Mumbai informing him that he would have to report sharp at 9:30 am.

On the day of the interview, Deval arrived in Mumbai early in the morning. As a safeguard, he had booked himself into one of the earliest flights reaching Mumbai. At the airport, he had to wait for some time though before he could find an auto that would take him to the

interview venue. Since he was not sure whether his travel expenses would be reimbursed he didn't intend to multiply his risks. Interestingly, it took him more than 2 hours to reach the place and about 40 minutes to locate the office since not many people in the area knew about the exact location. He had a prayer on his lips when he finally found the venue. He had barely made it when he realized he was in a mess - he was half-drenched in sweat and was really thirsty from the exertion. As soon as he entered the office, he was met by 2 burly security guards who asked him for an identity. Deval showed them the interview letter he received and mentioned he was in touch with a Ramanujan. It took them 15 minutes to trace Ramanujan through the intercom and another 10 minutes to issue Deval, a badge. By the time Deval found himself at the Interview Hall, he was nervous, irritated and tired. To top it all, Ramanujan greeted him with a cold stare and asked him why he was late for the interview. When Deval tried to explain that he was delayed by security, Ramanujan cut him short by saying he would have to wait for an hour as 2 other candidates had been lined up before him now.

Deval didn't mind the delay since it gave him an opportunity to relax and become refreshed. However, it took him some time to find the washroom since there was no one around to facilitate and surprisingly, no signboards either. Apparently, there were a lot of people who had turned up and while some chatted with each other to ease their nerves, a few were busy with their laptops. Deval 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 the sophisticated air that some deliberately put on or the cultivated American accent that some had. He now regretted not taking his friend's advice to attend classes offered by some of the fancy finishing schools mushrooming in Patna. Incidentally, these schools taught everything from walking in a distinguishable style to even laughing in a manner meant to impress folks in the corporate world. As Deval stared around the room, he couldn't but help notice how many candidates increasingly looked like clones in their mannerisms and style. Surely, diversity or uniqueness would also be appreciated, he told himself, reassuringly.

It was close to lunch when Deval was greeted by a smiling Ramanujan and hurriedly ushered into the Interview room. Apparently, the interviews before Deval had taken longer than expected and Deval was worried he would only delay lunch hour for the interviewers and quite obviously spoil his chances. The look with which he was greeted by the panelists (3 in all - 2 elderly gentlemen and a smartly dressed youngish looking lady) confirmed his suspicions. Deval smiled apologetically at the 3 interviewers as he walked into the room and politely wished each before settling into a chair closest to the interview table.

Mr. Mehra, Director - Marketing, introduced himself and also introduced his fellow-panelists, Ms. Pushpa - Head HR and Mr. Makhan - Zonal Head for the Mumbai Region. Mr. Mehra was trying hard not to look unruffled over the arrangements since he had to shelve many

last-minute meetings thanks to the interviews. His good friend, Mr. Makhan, had sounded him only a few days back and he couldn't turn down his request. As far as he was concerned Ms. Pushpa, had a reputation for springing surprises and he was trying hard not to show his displeasure with the functioning of the HR Department publicly. The HR team under Ms. Pushpa had only continued their earlier role of pushing papers and files seemingly without being effective. Worse, everything seemed uncoordinated as the department had nothing by way of a schedule. Everything was left to the last minute and all her subordinates constantly bombarded him with useless mails. Incidentally, a day before the interviews he had asked to see the resumes of all the candidates shortlisted for the interview. Ms. Pushpa's assistant, Ramanujan, sent him not less than 50 resumes, some of these from last year's pool of applications. By the time the mess was sorted out, Mr. Mehra was on a flight from Delhi to Mumbai. He now looked at Deval and had no clue about the young man's resume. Meanwhile, his co-panelists were embarrassingly enough, poring over Deval's resume and trying to make sense of the profile. To break the ice, Mr. Mehra asked Deval, gently, where he was from. When Deval told him he was based at Patna, everybody looked at him with a sense of surprise. Ms. Pushpa almost dropped Deval's resume and tried hard to avoid the expression - a mixture of shock and revulsion, on her face.

Deval realized he would be a curiosity the moment he mentioned Patna. Obviously, everybody had some impression about Bihar - most of it nasty. Deval suddenly found his heart pounding wildly - this was clearly, not a good start. Mr. Makhan, though, seemed curiously interested in continuing the thread. "So, what do you do, of all the places in Patna, my friend?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye. Deval explained how he had been posted there only recently and by way of clarification added, that he hailed from Gujarat. "Hmmm," said Mr. Mehra, "so you are from Dhirbuhai's land?" "Yes", said Deval half-smiling. "But actually, he is from Chorwad which is in South Gujarat and we are from North Gujarat," he added. "Chorwad" exclaimed Mr. Makhan, cleverly emphasizing the "chor" in the word and burst out laughing wildly. The others joined him and Deval 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. Pushpa'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. Pushpa answered the phone and suggested to her co-panelists that it was an urgent matter and she had to attend it. As Ms. Pushpa, left the room, Mr. Makhan and Mr. Mehra resumed looking at Deval's resume with an air of seriousness.

Mr. Makhan interrupted the heavy silence a few seconds later, by asking Deval 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 Deval's answer. Deval 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 Deval. Mr. Mehra 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. Deval 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. Pushpa walked in waving her flashy cell and very loudly, declared, "Folks, it's almost lunch time!"

Mr. Makhan found it quite awkward on Pushpa'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, Pushpa!" he replied, "as soon as we are done with Mr. Deval."

Barely had Ms. Pushpa settled in her seat, Deval 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 Patna. Worried, at the possibility of explaining the sudden appearance of a mysterious aunt in his life to his bosses, he began to think more and more of rushing out of the interview room and reaching the airport.

Visit our website

www.humancapitalonline.com

ANALYSIS

Better preparation is in order



Aparna Sharma

Director-HR, UCB

Aparna is a Post Graduate in Personnel Management & Industrial Relations (PM & IR) from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai of the 1996 batch. She has worked with Nocil, Monsanto and Novartis before joining UCB as Director-HR for their Indian operations comprising of Field Sales, Centre of Excellence - Bangalore & Manufacturing facility. In each of her jobs, she has been able to bring about key changes and also make a long term impact for the organization. Aparna is an active member of various professional associations like, Indian Society of Training & Development (ISTD), All India Management Association (AIMA), National Institute of Personnel Management (NIPM), National HRD Network, and Sumedhas. On the personal front, Aparna is a very avid reader, poetess, intrepid traveler, nature and wildlife enthusiast, amateur photographer, has a passion for gardening and a keen people collector.

There is always a trigger to get a professional started on the job search or hunt process. For Deval, it was his performance and consistent track record over 7 years in various locations which was under question in his current location, Patna. He was not able to manage all local operational issues in Bihar successfully which led to his bosses in Delhi questioning his credibility. That came as a surprise and shock to Deval and this was the trigger in his case.

His approach towards job search was methodical and appropriate in the following ways:

1. Choice of industry/sector, retail in his case, since his post MBA experience of 7 years was in retail
2. Selection of position: Marketing Manager, Marketing Director, Business Development Manager and Marketing Coordinator
3. Scanning advertisements in leading national dailies and online job portals.
4. Preparation of a resume or make-over of existing resume: Deval used professional services for sprucing up his CV to make it more presentable
5. Covering letter, which is as important as the resume. Deval tweaked each to correspond to the job he was applying.

This is a classic case of how an interview should not be conducted.

There is no reference to a job description for the position, which is always a pre-requisite for recruitment. Ramanujan seemed to be more interested in sending a large number of resumes to Mehra, which is why he even took resumes from last year's applications. It is not clear whether Ramanujan sourced all the resumes from the web or used a placement firm as well. Either way, the first thing was to match candidate profiles with the job description and shortlist those who fitted the bill. This way, fewer resumes would have been sent to Mehra, who could have studied the profiles properly. Nobody gives the Head of Marketing 50 resumes and asks him to screen them. This is clearly HR's job. Any placement firm would not just dump CV's, even they send resumes only after thorough preliminary screening.

It is clear that the interviews were arranged in a hurry.

Recruitment is a serious part of business, more so in the retail business, where people are key assets. Yet, it appears as if HR had a target of arranging interviews without worrying about outcome.

When candidates are called for interviews, the email must have the company's address, preferably the name of a landmark, and the name of person to ask for on reaching the reception. This way the candidate has complete clarity. A landmark helps outstation candidates find the office easily. It also indicates how organized HR is and enhances candidate confidence about the organization. After all, every candidate would like to work for a professionally run well managed organization.

Here is what transpired when a sweaty and harassed Deval entered the company office. He was intercepted by security guards as if he were a street side crook. It means that there was no reception in this company or reception was manned by security guards. A fifteen-minute wait to find Ramanujan added to Deval's frustration. How could a candidate give his best at an interview when he was lost and frustrated on reaching the company office? Ten minutes to issue a badge means that the company does not have an administration department or process is not well laid out.

If I were Deval, these would be questions that would run through my mind as I entered this retail giant's office. A company and a candidate have to put up their best in the first ten minutes because impressions once formed are difficult to change. Think about it. Your impressions of a company would vary if you were interviewed at its factory in Bhandup (eastern suburb of Mumbai) instead of its corporate office at Peninsula Park (in Mumbai's Lower Parel area).

How could things have been organized? Security should have directed Deval to the reception, where the receptionist would have seen Deval's interview letter and requested him to sit down while she spoke with Ramanujan. While waiting for the interview call, Deval could have entered his name in the visitors' register and obtained a visitor's badge from the receptionist. She could have directed Deval to the washroom in case he wanted to freshen up. Water glasses could have been kept in the area where all the candidates were sitting. The weather

appears to be hot and sultry, so water is a must to put candidates at ease.

For convenience and better co-ordination, the receptionist should have been given a list of candidates. Ramanujan should have ensured that he was present at his desk, so that he could be accessible to both the receptionist and the interview panel. The responsibility to escort candidates from the reception to the interview room should have been assigned to one of the secretaries.

It appears that Deval reached at about 11:00 am against his interview time of 9:30 am. There were a lot of other candidates who had come for the interview. His turn finally came nearly two hours later. There seems to be no proper scheduling of interviews and time allocated to each candidate was not adhered to.

A list of all candidates should have been prepared by HR and given to the receptionist. Every candidate should have been given a specific time slot for the interview. With this framework, the receptionist could coordinate with Ramanujan on which candidate should be sent for the interview. The sequence could change depending on how many candidates actually came and time taken for each interview.

As simple as that! Here on the other hand, there was confusion galore.

HR should have taken special care to ensure that atleast outstation candidates were given a small snack. Can you imagine Deval's state? He took an early morning flight from Patna to Mumbai and spent nearly three hours reaching the company office. He was not even offered water on reaching, had to fend for himself at every point. In such a state, the interview started. Soon after the interview began, Pushpa announced the lunch time, without having the courtesy to invite Deval to join them.

I remember my first job interview. At lunch time, the recruitment manager escorted all the candidates present to the lunch room and bought us coupons. We were so impressed with the lunch room and food not to forget the manner in which we were escorted that two of us resolved to work even harder to make a success of the interview. Twelve years later I still remember and recount this incident to our company's new recruits and HR team alike.

The interviewers should have thanked Deval for coming all the way from Patna and showing interest in their organization while getting ready to have lunch. Makhan might have asked some questions about development in Bihar under the new regime of Nitish Kumar. Given the state of Deval's mind, he would not have asked for reimbursement of travel expenses. Surely Pushpa or Ramanujan would not have raised it either. Deval would have left the room dejected, frustrated and poorer by 20k.

Deval could have approached the current problem and solution very differently.

He had worked with this retail giant for nearly seven years and earned his stripes in all previous postings except Bihar. We all know that Bihar is not the easiest market to operate in. Not only is it economically challenged but law and order, roads, communications are a major issue, which have begun to improve only recently.

The first thing for Deval to do was to reflect on what was going wrong in Bihar and why? To the extent things were within his control, he should have taken action; for others he should have effectively communicated the same to his boss and head office, so there is an appreciation of local dynamics. A 7 year reputation must not get jeopardized just because of one average stint. The reason for extreme demotivation seems difficult to fathom.

Having decided to job hunt, he could have been more patient rather than go for the very first interview and that too in a hurry. The retail sector has gone through tough times too due to the economic slowdown and recovery has just begun. Retail companies would surely take time recruiting for middle level positions. It seems like a classic case of a 7 year itch!

His interaction with the Mumbai based company and travel shows desperation. If he had been in the retail business for 7 years, am sure he could have networked to find out more about the Mumbai based company. When Ramanujan called, he forgot to ask if travel cost would be reimbursed. If the interview was at 9.30 am, the company would expect the candidate to reach Mumbai the previous night. If only Deval had asked about expense reimbursement, he could have planned the trip better.

In today's connected world, I am surprised Deval did not conduct adequate research about the company and find out the estimated time from airport to office or use Google Earth to know exact office location. One of the fundamentals of going for an interview/meeting is to reach before the scheduled time. Deval forgot that. He reached the office sweaty, tired and grumpy. Waiting for two other candidates to finish, and bad administration only added to the feeling of discomfort.

When his turn to speak came, Deval did not take the initiative to set the tone for the interview by introducing himself and the company he worked for. This was important because Mehra and Makhan had not gone through his profile.

The interview is your chance to shine, so now is not the time to be quiet and timid. Develop a 25-second sales pitch that sings your praises. In business this is called an 'elevator speech', a compelling overview of why you? That can be recited in the time it takes to ride the elevator. It should include your strengths, abilities, and what sets you apart uniquely from others. In short, why are you the right candidate for the job?

Instead, Deval got defensive about being from Patna, forgetting that some of the brightest brains in the government of India come from Bihar. When a friend worked with Hindustan Unilever's Khamgaon factory, she said she worked with Levers and was posted at Khamgaon. She added that she had worked earlier in Chennai, Kolkatta and Chandigarh. Meeting or interview, the starting conversation needs to be well rehearsed.

Instead of being defensive about why he wanted to be a flower, he should have stood his ground and said that he would like to blossom in good times and share warmth around rather than exist for the sake of existing. The interviewer was checking Deval if he could think on

case study

his feet.

Some interviewers test candidates by showing disinterest in the interview to know how candidate reacts in adverse situations. Deval had not attended interviews for long and thought disinterest was a reflection on his competence.

Within minutes of the interview starting, Deval was regretting having come and worried about his boss's visit to Patna. In my view he was neither here nor there.

Mehra has a tough time to start with. Imagine being sent 50 resumes and that too one day before the interviews. Instead HR should have screened the resumes, shortlisted candidates not more than 5-7 and sent their resumes atleast three days before the interviews. Ringing of phone during interviews is disruptive and breaks the chain of conversation. Pushpa should have kept the cell on silent mode instead. As Deval entered, she could have said that it was lunch time, all of them could talk over lunch and thereafter.

Interviewers needed to be better prepared in terms of the questions they would ask and who would test what. They could have taken roles among themselves as a panel & not asked abstract questions just for the sake of it.

Here are some handy tips for preparing for an interview-

1. Do your homework. Research the company beforehand so that you can showcase that knowledge during the interview.
2. Know where you're going. Make sure to find out where the office is and how to get there. Do you know how long the trip will take? Do you have the name and phone number of the person you'll be meeting with? Finalizing the logistics from end to end... time, place, documents required, reimbursements, applying for leave etc. This is



really important so that one can focus on the real interview preparation. In the case, Deval did not have all details in place till the last moment eg. Interview venue, whether tickets will be reimbursed, so he was more jittery.

3. Look the part. Your clothing should be neat, pressed, and professional looking. As it can be difficult to know the culture of the office environment beforehand, err on the side of conservative. Even if everyone's wearing jeans when you arrive, you're still probably better off having shown up in a suit. However, don't be afraid to inject some personality into your look, and don't neglect the details. Make sure to have a fresh haircut and clean, manicured nails.

4. Rehearse beforehand. Prior to your interview, prepare answers to common questions the interviewer is likely to ask, such as 'What are your strengths and weaknesses?', 'Why do you want to work here?', 'Why should we hire you?' and the ever popular 'Tell me about yourself'. Conduct a mock interview with a trusted friend as practice.

5. Secure your references. Find at least three key people (former supervisors, colleagues, or instructors), who are willing to serve as your professional references. Be sure to secure their permission beforehand, and be certain that they will speak highly of you if contacted by a potential employer.

6. Arrive early. Be sure to arrive at least 15 minutes before the interview. Visit the restroom and check your appearance in the mirror. Announce yourself to the receptionist to let him or her know that you have arrived and that you have an appointment. Turn your cell phone off so it doesn't ring during your meeting.

7. Bring necessary documentation. Make a checklist of documents that you will need for the interview, and make sure that you have them in your briefcase before leaving home. These documents may include extra copies of your résumé, a passport, driver's license, or portfolio of writing samples or other professional work. If you are a recent graduate, you should also bring along your college transcripts.

8. Don't neglect to ask questions. Based on your earlier research, ask how the responsibilities of the open position relate to the company's goals and plans for the future. Interviewers are often favorably impressed by candidates who show that they are knowledgeable about the organization.

9. Follow up. After the interview, don't forget to send a handwritten note or friendly email thanking the interviewer for his or her time and consideration, as well as restating your interest and commitment to the position. If you don't hear anything after one week, call to politely inquire when they will be making a final decision.

Every interview is a valuable learning experience. Even if you don't get this particular job, when the next interview rolls around, you'll be much better prepared and more at ease with the whole process. All of which can go a long way to boosting your confidence and improving your chances of being offered the next job. Good luck!

Put the candidate in the centre



Balaji E

Chief Executive officer and Director, Ma Foi Management Consultants

In his current role Balaji leads Ma Foi's Staffing business. He has over 16 years experience which began at Ma Foi in 1994. He manages a team of nearly 1000 professionals spread across 60 locations. He has extensive experience in designing the recruitment processes using multi pronged strategies in attracting the right talent. He has written number of articles on HR trends in various business journals and is frequently quoted in business Magazines and dailies on HR trends. He has done his Bachelors in Physics from Madras Christian College, Chennai and Masters in Business Administration from School of Management, Pondicherry University. He is a certified Lead Auditor (IRCA, UK) for ISO 9001: 2000 and a certified six sigma green belt. He has a keen interest in Management literature, philosophy and history.

Recruitment and interviews are frontline functions and they serve as important indicators to organization doorway. It is quite apparent from the case that the DOORWAY is dysfunctional. The fact that it took Deval a while to get in touch with HR staff like Ramanujam to confirm the dates and other formalities of a interview process are indicators enough. However busy the schedule of HR it is HR's responsibility to make a prospective employee "Wanted & Welcomed". Hence the retail Giant fails the "First Impact Test".

Interview process is part of the daily routine of any HR department and likewise there are instructions with front office/admin for daily schedule and the necessary welcome boards/ and other instructional are always in play especially when senior candidates are being invited for discussions. It's not clear from the case what kind of instruction boards were available for Deval's interview. The fact that it took awhile for him to look for the rest room is another reason why the retail Gaint fails the "Second Impact Test".

Pre-interview activities are extremely important for seamless process, the HR has to take charge and inform all participants of the interview panel the schedule as well as brief on prospective candidates. Given that we all have busy schedules and also there will be last minute issues regarding candidates and panellists, it is very clear from the case that the HR had totally lost the plot for the day with a list of 50 to be reviewed just a day before the interviews. Ms Pushpa the HR lead, needless to say was leading the CHAOS from the FRONT. Sadly for Deval this was not a good picture at all and he would have appreciated that the panel would at least be briefed about his candidature if not the full CV review.

Ramanujam like his boss is following the path of self destruction. In today's recruitment environment everything is real time, one needs to have the most recent information about the candidates not "Last Year" resume. So much can change for candidates over a year! The retail Gaint fails the "Third Impact Test"

Any interview just short of lunch or after lunch generally tends to be rushed especially when one is pressed for time. There will usually be situations when the schedule goes out of sync but one can always contain the drag and manage the situation. Deval unfortunately

got caught in a whirlwind of bad timings, where the panellist (Ms.Pushpa) was busy with phone calls, missing lunches and hence she does not evince any interest in Deval.

Her co-panellist Mr.Makhan and Mr.Mehra do give an impression of interest in Deval but the sequence and form of questioning leaves much to be desired. It is different when one wants to ease the candidate for interview and quite another when you joke around needlessly at the cost of the candidates. This shows a lack of professionalism. There will be situations during the interview when you meet different personalities all must be given the respect they truly deserve and no prejudicial remarks or biases should be commented overtly or covertly. In this case the panellists have crossed the line of decency by mocking the Deval hometown of "Chorwad" and his work location of "Patna". It must be noted that candidates are not mute spectators in process, they too are judging the interviewer and drawing their own conclusions about the work culture and environment of the organisation. India fortunately or unfortunately does not have strict EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) legislations like in the west wherein the line of questioning during employment discussions have strict guidelines. Sadly for Deval the interview day horrors seem to continue and The retail Gaint fails the "Fourth Impact Test".

How Deval's interview would have ended

Deval comes across as a hard working, honest professional with a sound track record to his credit. The present circumstances have left him anguished and keen to look at other avenues.

His simplicity seems to have given the panellists an impression that he may not suit the fast paced work culture of a big city. Hence they wanted to test his mettle through a stress interview, hence questions on city and work location and some highly unprofessional personal innuendos. They did succeed in rattling him.

One should also note that since Deval had been out of the job market scenario, he too was out of sync of modern interview methodologies. He was trying too hard to make an impression and had a very conventional thought process of how an interview should proceed. It is important for modern day professionals to stay in touch with the current trends in the market, like for example

the growth of professional social networking sites like LINKEDIN where in people have their profiles and HR folks actively search for the right candidate on his GOOGLE INFO/LINKEDIN profiles before they arrive for the interview, looking at external endorsements on the sites.

The case simply ends with Deval's thoughts so it is difficult to imagine how the Interview would have progressed especially after Deval himself was out of the interview room mentally and had already reached the comfort of his office in Patna. He gave up too soon, may be the post lunch interview would have "Changed the Flavour of the Day" and would have been the crucial game changing "Fifth Impact Test".

How things could have been different for Deval and interviewers

It's all about the setting of the "Pitch", had the HR been in control and been more responsible in inviting Deval for the interview we would be looking at a different result. Just like in cricket one bad over can lead to a mammoth collapse, similarly the Deval starting was not very encouraging, there can always be uncertainties but one should try to avoid blind spots every candidate should be given the right direction to interview locations and also provided information on reimbursements if any.

Such small steps set the right tone for the prospective candidates and he /she generally formulates some impression of the firm, that's a good start. Once the candidates arrive for the interview, clear instructions should be provided and may be an agenda for senior level hires could be provided. Additionally the HR should have aides as well to help the candidates during the day.

The interview should be well coordinated and the panellist should have had time to discuss the profiles and briefing is a must by HR or line hire authority. In addition to the JD shared with prospective candidates the HR should take the time to explain what role the candidate is being considered for, what will be the selection process, what is the firm looking for as "Organizational Fit" etc. Most of the forward looking organizations today, have information about the same on their career pages. There are quite a few tools available with HR which can be used in most interview processes, like structured interviews/case interviews to name a few for effective interview process, it's not clear what tools were at play in the Deval case.

HR should always strive to create the best in class impression/experience for a job seeker even though he/she might not make the cut; the experience should leave him/her savouring the moment. As organisations strive to claim their space in various rankings of "Best Places to Work For", "Employer of the year" the onus is on HR to keep the it's flag flying high and working towards being the "Employer of Choice"

The giant retail major just had to keep things simple and put the candidate in the centre!

