

## Shrunk



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**Y**ou've applied for a VP job at a new company you think is a great fit. You've interviewed with HR, with your potential boss and with a peer. Your references have passed muster and you're hoping for THE call. Instead you get THAT call. "We're very interested in you, but as part of our selection process, we want you spend a day in assessment with a psychologist

so we can find out more about your work style."

Forget about the shrink of downsizing: the shrink of recruitment is also daunting. An "assessment" can include various tests, personality inventories, interviews, and work simulation exercises. You'll spend a good chunk of a day with an industrial psychologist (a/k/a an organizational psychologist) who knows the job and the company and who integrates all of the data collected to produce a written report for the hiring manager and/or HR.

Employers have their top candidates "shrunk" to make a well-informed decision. This isn't cheap, so it is done selectively. Assessments can range from \$1000 to \$6000+ depending upon the depth probed. You should be complimented when invited to be "assessed." It means the company is seriously considering you and wants to know how you make decisions and react to stress; whether you're empathic, how dominant are you and if you tend to micro-manage or empower others. They want to tease out how you organize yourself and communicate, how you take direction and make decisions (quickly or cautiously) and so on.

There are no "right" answers that fit all situations. Different employers look for different characteristics to fulfill set needs. I was recently called in to assess three candidates for a VP position in a large manufacturing facility. After making some expensive hiring mistakes, the head of HR learned that the VP needed to comfortably relate and communicate with all types of people, from the CEO to the janitor. The previous VP had been an inflexible stickler for rules who could not tolerate authority. All three candidates were well qualified, but during the "shrinkage" it was revealed that one far outshone the others as a genuine "people person" and communicator. She got the job.

Although each experience is different, depending upon the psychologist, the job, and the company's needs, many of the elements are standard. Generally you'll receive a packet of information and some psychological inventories to complete before your assessment. These will give the psycholo-

gist an idea of your personality traits and how people experience you.

You may be assessed at your prospective employer but more likely will go to the psychologist's office for a work-style interview (1.5-2 hours); abilities testing and work simulations. You may be there from 4-7 hours.

Your interview will be based on your career history and experiences. Typical questions may be: "What was the most difficult decision you had to make during your career? Why? What were the circumstances? How did it turn out?" and "Who was your best boss? What did you learn from that person?" and "If your colleagues were here, what would they say are your best qualities? What would they like to change about you?"

The abilities tests will cover logical and critical problem solving, but feel like math, vocabulary and analogy tests. Many candidates find this intimidating.

You may also learn about a "make-believe" company and your role in it. Then you may complete an in-basket, where you attend to problems such as a disgruntled employee, a

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non-performer, difficult customers, and a weak boss. You may also be asked to role-play where a further problem is presented to you and you act it out with an evaluator.

The reports can cover leadership, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, organizational management, achievement and personal characteristics. I also include an overview of strengths and development areas. You'll probably be asked to sign a release of information before participating in an assessment to make it clear who can see your report. The company has the choice of giving you a copy. I encourage sharing the results and believe it would help you take an in-depth look at an objective assessment of your personality and leadership traits.

If you're asked to participate in a selection assessment, approach the experience with energy, a positive attitude, and lots of sleep the night before. Know that the company in which you are interested is highly selective and wants the best people. They are willing to invest in the process and in you.

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