

Cat in the bag

ravinder bhatia has tips on getting over the next hurdle

WITH the Common Admission Test for 2011, involving 13 Indian Institutes of Management and more than 150 management colleges across the country, over the focus is now on all the 205,000 candidates in the second phase of the admission process which consists of a group discussion, personal interview, case studies, extempore, etc. This is the stage where candidates' confidence and spontaneity in decision-making will be judged by a panel of judges. This phase is equally crucial for each candidate to be eligible for admission in a particular college. One can anticipate some questions and prepare the ideal answers but, remember, there is no ideal answer. For this stage, your replies should be in sync with your personality and the prevailing situation, so your answers need to be clear and precise.

While selecting candidates, the MBA schools always look for special qualities that will justify their reputation as also the courses they offer them. You should have "fire in the belly" and the zeal to achieve something big. They look for achievers. MBA programmes want students who can lead others and be responsible for the management of an entire organisation. Because leadership is one of the main ingredients for success, your communication skills, initiative and motivation can become the most important aspects of the admission process which are tested through group

discussions.

MBA schools look for the candidate who has acquired value by being at the helm in group-based activities and are comfortable in this role, works well with others and operates smoothly and constructively in a collaborative situation; one who is not afraid of winning and seeing others lose, has good interpersonal values and morals, brings interesting attributes, experiences and depth of background to the group, is comfortable with change and ready to use it creatively, can write, speak and organise ideas well. In short, B-schools look for knowledge, presentation and analytic skills, confidence, team spirit and self-understanding.

Group discussions are conducted to test your managerial attributes, like interpersonal skills, leadership, analytical and rational thinking, knowledge and personality traits. Communicating in a clear and fluent manner is a must. GDs are aimed at determining your leadership potential and qualities, very good team skills, innovation, creativity, adaptability and the willingness to change, diversity in any aspect of life, etc.

You can prepare for group discussions in two levels — individual and group. You should focus on improving your fluency and listening skills. In order to improve your fluency, tonal quality and articulation, you should start reading aloud from a book or newspaper, preferably in front of a mirror. You should also have some discussions in your peer group.

One of the crucial parts of group discussion is listening. A good listener can summarise discussions in a decent



manner. In this way, he/she can get a good score by presenting a good case over an idea provided by other participants. You should do some listening exercises for the purpose preparation.

Avoid the following, during the group discussion or interview:

- Shaking your legs;
- Picking your nose;
- Chewing gum;
- Playing with your tie;
- Slouching in the chair;

- Wearing a tie without buttoning the collar; and
- Wearing unpressed clothes, esp a suit.

For the preparation for content, you have to pick some current affair topics and do research on them. You should understand an event from different perspectives, such as personal, social,

political, cultural, academic, etc. You should remember some important facts and figures of the topic. You should also read national dailies.

When practicing for case study, it is important to consider the following:

- Analyse information, conclude, act and recommend action;
- Be logical and clear in your reasoning; and
- Maintain good eye contact and listen carefully to the information you

you in the first few minutes of the meeting and spend the rest of the interview confirming their initial impression.

Dress impeccably, preferably in a black/blue suit, clean, polished and conservative shoes. Wear minimal deodorant/perfume. Try to be your witty, charming, natural self. Do not try to put on an act. The interviewer will be able to see through your mask. The interview panel may include students so don't treat the students as lightweights. Before you appear for an interview, you should have a good idea about what you consider to be your greatest strength. Open-ended questions like "Introduce yourself" are usually the ones that kick things off. The lack of preparation is a common complaint among interviewers, and if you are prepared you will stand out among your competitors.

Common interview questions include:

- Tell me about yourself;
- Why should we select you?
- Where do you see yourself after completing your MBA?
- What are your strong and weak points?

Do enough research about yourself and the B-school so that you have the right answers to some usual questions. These may include, "Why are you right for this particular business school?" and "Why is this particular programme right for you?"

You will need to develop and present a framework. Always remember to include Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats while discussing the case study. You don't need to stick rigidly to a framework but use it to frame your answers. With written case studies, remember to think about your presentation — use paragraphs and bullet points to make your points clear. Best of Luck!

The writer is an assistant professor at the Asia-Pacific Institute of Management, New Delhi

are given.

The focus of a B-School interview can range from specific questions about your job to broad discussions on life. Approach the interview as a conversation to be enjoyed, not as a question-and-answer order. A discussion about your hobby may just go on and on. This doesn't mean that the interviewers are not serious. It just means that you are being sized up as a person and a future professional in all your dimensions. The interviewers develop an impression of