

The Group Interview

More and more companies are running group interviews and assessment centres. From part time jobs, graduate opportunities, through to the biggest companies looking to do joint venture projects. They can be a real surprise the first time you are faced with one. You walk into a room to find 15 to 30 people. Group interviews are commonly used by a wide variety of organisations, because it gives them an opportunity to see how well you can perform in leadership and team situations. How well you react and interact with others out of your comfort zone or under pressure.

Group interviews are what I call self-selection, because you succeed or knock yourself out, by the way you act and interact. Demonstrate good personal and interpersonal skills, all of which will be under review throughout the session.

Several different tasks, scenarios or role-plays may be set up. They're usually introduced and directed by one person, the facilitator, with a number of observers and can run for one to two hours. Their aim is to see how you present your opinions, react when you disagree with what's being said and how well you help others reach outcomes. They may also change the direction and complexity of the exercise as it moves along, to see how you react in a changing and uncontrolled environment.

You may start off in a solo exercise, which then turns into a group activity. You may be put in control of a group activity or asked to chair a meeting. Sometimes the group will have no apparent designated leader. You may be asked to introduce yourself to another person and find out all about them and then introduce them to the group. This is about listening skills and genuine interest in others. Or discuss why you would be good for this position. Don't be embarrassed, just imagine it is a one on one interview and answer positively and directly. You will be observed constantly as they assess you for the future, as well as for their immediate needs. This is a real-time dynamic interview!

Handling group interviews: Don't dominate or be a wall flower. It is important that you are friendly, enthusiastic and contribute positively. Be aware of others and involve them. Be willing to take on other's ideas, demonstrate initiative and be a lateral thinker. Even if you know all the answers, help others to reach the correct conclusion.

Think about how you would like to be treated as a customer, company team member or act as a future manager.

Good luck in your next interview, James E Lynch