

A WILL-DO ATTITUDE WORKS

A list of aspects that organisations expect from fresh management graduates



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India is one of the developing and emerging markets, the high-growth economies, with a potential to take the big leap and become a developed nation within one generation. We will soon enjoy the advantage of the demographic dividend with a majority of the population in the working age which will infuse, in itself, a virtuous cycle of economic growth.

This, however, is dependent on this workforce being well prepared to handle jobs as well as workstations across the country and the globe. To attain this, the education industry has an important role to play. Currently, it is a booming sector with 367 universities and 18,000 colleges with half-a-million teachers and nearly 11 million students on rolls. However, the employability of the graduates that have been churned out year after year is a challenge. There is a need for a substantial upliftment in areas like skills and capabilities of the young workforce.

Today, one of the most attractive professional career options for the Indian youth is undoubtedly business management. Yet, there is uncertainty around the employability of these fresh graduates. According to several talent-pool reports by Merit Trac and National Association of Software and Services Companies, only 25 per cent management graduates here are employable.

First principles

Today companies are operating in complex environments, where the quality and calibre of the talent provide the competitive edge. It is the team of diverse, vibrant and meritocratic employees that will steer organisations to meet their growth

ambitions. This holds true as much for entry-level talent as it does for senior-level recruitments.

Most forward-looking organisations have the following expectations from their young talents

■ **Strong functional basics:** A sound foundation in the employee's academic domain, and the ability to apply those concepts to practise is a basic expectation from fresh management graduates. In addition, an understanding of the preferred sector would help the individual and organisation make the decision to hire.

■ **The right mindset/authenticity:** Self-belief coupled with a can-do or will-do attitude make for a successful professional, and set apart high performers from the average performers. Individuals make the workplace, and most organisations want people who are brimming with enthusiasm and passion. In addition to a positive outlook, people who can speak their beliefs with authenticity and candour make all the difference.

■ **Rigour and a questioning mind:** Individuals who can dive deep and get to the bottom of issues, evaluate multiple options/scenarios, and pose questions like "why" and "who" not only related to others but also on themselves are considered assets. While the ability to challenge the status quo is essential, it is equally important to build constructively with a fresh perspective. People who can strike the right balance are those who have the potential to be groomed as the future 'thought leaders'.

■ **Zeal to learn and share:** While academic courses lay the foundation, on-the-job learning from one's experiences, peers and seniors prepare an individual for the future. An individual's openness and willingness to learn and share with others

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ers will set him or her apart.

■ **To get connected:** Successful organisations don't function in silos. Managers need to be able to influence stakeholders across levels and functions, which calls for an innate passion and flair for work. Individual excellence supported strongly with the ability to leverage interdependencies is the way to the future.

Successful organisations hire talent not only to fill gaps but also to create a virtuous cycle of business leaders

The HUL perspective

At Hindustan Unilever Limited, attracting and developing young talent is a key deliverable for leaders across levels. This is a process that is jointly owned by human resource and the business cell. Leaders at senior-most levels inside the organisation have a role to play, and are held accountable for the same.

Our approach to recruiting and nurturing leaders has been built over several decades, and each generation of leaders has left a legacy by bringing in the right talent. This constant endeavour of selecting the brightest minds from the best business schools in the country and abroad, and grooming them to take up challenging responsibilities, has made HUL a "leadership factory". We have groomed over 400 chief executive officers for Unilever and India Inc. While the process of selection has been evolved, the core philosophy remains unchanged, and that is about spotting the early signs of leadership. From our experience, it's evident that much of an individual's leadership potential has been hardwired before he reaches his early- or mid-twenties, and the moment management graduates knock at the door of a corporation, their leadership style looks in shape by

early experiences.

While we look for all the traits mentioned in the first part of the article, in small or great measure certain behaviours are paramount which we call the "standards of leadership". These are the parameters set for the people we hire; apart from the competing set our selection process is designed to identify individuals who have

demonstrated these behaviours in their personal and professional experience. These "standards of leadership" are equally relevant for fresh hires and senior-most level hires in the organisation:

- A growth mindset and passion for winning,
- Consumer and customer and external focus,
- Bias for action and excellence in execution which is as important as the ability to generate new ideas
- Accountability and responsibility for an employee's performance and delivery
- Ability to build talent and teams; no matter at what level you are in the organisation.

Organisations that are successful are those that hire talent not only to fill the current skill and resource gaps but also to create a continuous cycle of business leaders over successive generations. We must be able to identify the people who can contribute to this flywheel and can create capacity not only for themselves but also for the organisation and at a larger level for the nation. IM

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