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An excerpt from an article by Phillip Healy:

### **Psychological appraisal - Ordeal or opportunity?**

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#### **Personality tests**

These are complicated to interpret and are sometimes maligned for a number of reasons:

- Some questions appear ridiculous: ‘I have strange and peculiar thoughts’ or ‘Evil spirits possess me at times’. A person who is not well adjusted can identify with these questions.
- Some may not seem relevant: ‘When I am with people I am bothered by hearing very queer things’, or ‘Once a week or more often I suddenly feel hot all over, without apparent cause’. Here, the tests are looking at groupings of questions, not individual items.
- Personality tests are sometimes misused. We often hear complaints from candidates who did not receive any feedback or were told they had been rejected on the basis of their psychological results. People who ‘fail’ are justifiably mystified: ‘Don’t I have a personality?’
- Sometimes the tests are interpreted by people who do not have a great deal of experience or understanding of the subtleties of the results. This should not occur, and you should ask about the qualifications and credentials of the individual who will be providing feedback to the client and yourself, if you have any concerns in this area.

#### **How to do your best in a psychological test**

Get a good night’s sleep. If you’ve been out late the night before, you may not perform at your best.

Consult various resources available that provide information on the structure of the tests and types of problems you may be required to solve. Test ‘samples’ may also sometimes be available.

Stay calm and relaxed as extreme anxiety can adversely affect your performance. Deep breathing can be helpful as it forces you to slow down. Avoid caffeine as it exacerbates the jittery feeling associated with nervousness, and rather eat a good breakfast on the day of testing.

If you are anxious, or something in your life is causing you concern, tell the psychologist during your pre-assessment interview. The more knowledge they have of your state of mind, the better able they are to make an accurate assessment of the results.

During the pre-assessment interview the psychologist should explain what the tests are designed to do, why you are undergoing them, and what happens to the results. If you have concerns or questions, don’t be afraid to raise them at this point.

Try to avoid assessing yourself as you go. Many of the tests are difficult to finish within the prescribed time, and you'll increase your anxiety and decrease your performance by worrying. Stop thinking your future hinges on your performance in these tests - it doesn't.

Be honest. You may invalidate the test (or come up as very strange). Good psychological tests have an effective validation key that picks up inconsistencies and reveals when someone is trying to appear 'too good to be true.'

Use the feedback session to glean as much information as you can for your own career development. The appraisal can assess where your skills and abilities fit. Ask the psychologist for ideas on areas of improvement, or discuss your personal aspirations in the light of the results.

The main issue to bear in mind when undergoing psychological appraisal, is that it will ultimately work for you. Use the opportunity to explore your potential and take control of your career direction.