

The Hiring Mantra: Behavioral Aptitude Counts

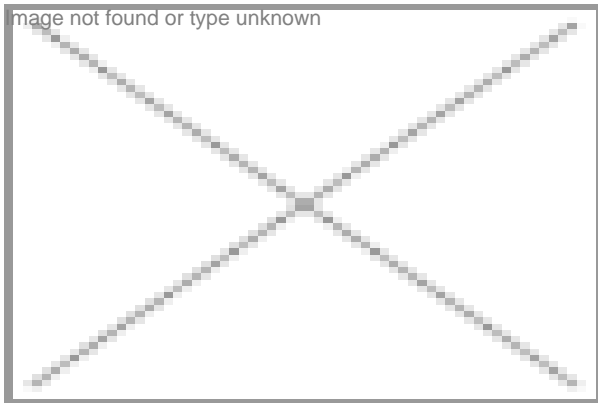
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With increase in competition, HR teams across biotech companies recruit freshers, not just on the basis of their technical expertise and domain knowledge but also on the behavioral aptitude of the candidate

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Human resource teams across the various sub-segments within the biotechnology sector, have come to realize the need to inject the much needed vigor, creativity, and above all, a fresh pool of innovative ideas into the pulse of their system. This radical transformation can come about by scouting and recruiting good quality freshers who are passing out of biotech universities and colleges. The modus operandi of selecting the cream of students from academic institutes include, meticulous methods of technical tests, interviews, psychometric tests.

Like its counterparts in other sectors, biotech companies, today, conduct several rounds of technical tests, group discussions and aptitude tests before short listing a final candidate. While in-depth knowledge and technical expertise about the industry is a critical factor that is often sort in a prospective candidate, companies also conduct thorough psychometric and screening tests to gauge the behavioral aptitude of a candidate. Some such attributes include decision-making skills, positivity, leadership abilities, ability to handle stressful situations, efficient communication skills and managerial skills, apart from the candidate's extra-curricular activities during his academic tenure. HR officials across different companies claim that although, these processes are time

consuming, at the end of the day it is worth the effort.

Mr KV Subramaniam, president, Reliance Life Sciences (RLS), says, "RLS looks for candidates with conceptual clarity on the subject, analytical ability and ability to apply the gained knowledge. Also essential are creative thinking, good communication skills, leadership abilities and confidence. Hence, several rounds of HR and technical interviews are conducted. Even though this is time consuming, it has helped to build an environment favorable for building the capabilities of the organization and employees."

College Recruitments 2010-2011

Company	College
Transasia Bio-Medicals	Amity, Symbiosis, IBS, DY Patil, Thadoomal, Auroprobe
Reliance Life Sciences	Reliance Institute of Life Sciences (RILS) initiated two programs - Young Professionals Program and Advance Diploma Programs
Zytex	UDCT Jalgaon
Ankur Seeds	PKV, Nagpur
Max Neeman International	Amity University; Balaji Institute of Management; Institute of Clinical Research India; MS University, Baroda; Punjab University, Chandigarh; Delhi University
Novozymes South Asia	IBAB, Bangalore
Mahyco	NIAM-Jaipur, VAMNICOM-Pune, IIPM-Bangalore, MANAGE " Hyderabad, IABM-Bikaner
Anthem Biosciences	Christ College, RV College & St Joseph

Reliance Institute of Life Sciences (RILS) rolled out a 'Young Professionals Program' (YPP), wherein fresh graduates and postgraduates in life sciences or related fields are inducted through national level tests and interview. They undergo three months' classroom training and nine months' on-the-job training at Dhirubhai Ambani Life Sciences (DALC) campus. On the successful completion, they are absorbed in various business domains within RLS. So far, almost 12 such programs have been conducted. RILS also initiated advanced diploma programs, which are of six months or one year duration. These programs enable fresh postgraduates and graduates to be groomed by in-house faculties and helps them to undergo classroom and on-the-job training. At the end of the program, they are awarded diploma certificates by the Reliance Institute of Life Sciences. Depending upon the requirements at RLS, these students are by and large absorbed in various functions, through standard selection process. Around 14 freshers were recruited into the company this year through these two programs.

Gurgaon-based multinational biopharma company, Eli Lilly, recruits around 80 freshers every year from premier pharmacy colleges and management institutes across the country. The HR team, apart from testing domain knowledge, has adopted the Thomas profiling methodology, which is used to gauge the personality of a potential candidate, in order to select the right individual for the job. Agri-biotech company, Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Limited (Mahyco), which apart from conducting the usual group discussions and personal interview rounds, also conducts Thomas profiling exercises.

New Delhi-based CRO, Max Neeman International, recruits around 90 freshers every year. Says Ms Vipra Datta, senior manager, HR, Max Neeman International, "While hiring candidates, we look at qualities like positive attitude, willingness to work and learn new concepts, technical skills and soft skills. We have technical questionnaires and structured interview questionnaires as a part of the hiring process to select the right candidate."

There has been a growing demand amongst students to opt for jobs in the agri-biotech sector, both in core technical departments and job roles requiring a management graduate background. Mr P L Gaekwad, vice president, HR, Mahyco, says, "We have been to five-six institutes like, the Indian Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM) and the Institute of Agri Business Management (IABM), Bikaner. This year we are looking to spread across the country and visit 10 more colleges for campus recruitments." The Jalna-based company recruited 19 freshers this year. Nagpur-based, Ankur Seeds, went to campuses like PKV, Nagpur, and recruited 40 freshers.

There have, however, been companies, who are yet to start recruiting freshers from campus placements but will gradually roll out the process in the near future. Reasons include, preference for experienced professionals in the sector, lack of specialized courses or colleges for a particular sub-segment or the company might be in a situation when it is just setting up new operations in the country.

Novozymes South Asia, for example, is in the process of setting up new processes and functions in India and hence they have not yet started campus recruitments yet. So far, the Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnology (IBAB) is the only institute from where they have recruited freshers this year. Mr G S Krishnan, regional president, Novozymes South Asia, says, "We did not have a rigorous campus recruitment program until now, as we are setting up new functions in India, which requires experienced professionals to incubate these functions locally. Once the new functions are set up to an extent that we have enough expertise to train fresh recruits, we would increasingly approach campuses. We are hoping to start in 2012 and as a step towards this initiative we have recruited project trainees."

The challenges of quality students

Are universities churning out quality students? There are two schools of thought pertaining to this issue. A set of experts believe that the situation has changed for the better, and universities and schools are taking initiatives to train and groom students to fit into the corporate culture.

Mr G Jayaraman, head-HR, administration and CSR, Transasia Bio-Medicals, says, "Colleges do provide adequate number of quality students. Some select institutes give adequate hands-on exposure by providing technical training, as a part of academic syllabus. Institutes such as Amity and Symbiosis focus more on soft skills training than technical aspects. Agrees Mr Gaekwad, "For the agri-biotech sector, we do get quality students every year. Institutes have a common entrance test from where the best students are chosen for the courses. The students we have recruited have met our expectations."

Given their technical expertise, companies believe that students merely need proper guidance and training in order to fit into the corporate culture. Induction and training programs is a step towards achieving this goal. Mr Sameer Bhariok, director-HR, Eli Lilly, says, "Training vistas not only cover the basic requirements of everyday job, but also emphasize on continually developing a person holistically, which includes honing soft skills too. We develop the right people through consistent and timely interventions, utilizing latest technologies that enable people to grow."

Another group of experts believes that there is a huge gap in demand and supply of freshers, due to which a large chunk of their resources go in training freshers to meet their standards. Lack of specialized courses in the country is a contributing factor towards this problem.

For instance, niche skills set for the enzyme industry is yet to be initiated in the country's academic institutes. "The niche skill sets and education in enzyme technology are subjects not taught in many Indian institutes, thus there is a skill set gap. We have very few PhD students opting for courses in enzyme technology in India," says Mr Krishnan.

Mr MG Shembekar, managing director, Ankur Seeds, says, "For agriculture and biotech industry, there has always been a gap for freshers in what they learn at colleges and university and what the industry actually needs."

Taking this into consideration, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has facilitated industrial training programs for postgraduate students to reduce the gap between the industry expectations and students produced by universities under a consortium called the Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL). Industry experts opine that it is a positive sign.

The government of Karnataka has taken the lead by supporting 12 BT Finishing Schools (selected by a committee comprising members of the Association of Biotech Led Enterprises (ABLE) and academicians) in the state, by providing them with financial support of upto `1 crore, which are expected to produce industry-ready persons for employment in the biotech sector.

Says Mr Shembekar, "There are very few universities in India with good research facilities, which provide quality students, but the kind of initiative taken by the BCIL for providing industrial training to the postgraduate freshers is a positive step in filling up the gap."

Nayantara Som in Mumbai