

**NEXT IAS**

# **EXCELLING IN INTERVIEWS**

**A Complete Guide**

*With special focus on*  
**Civil Services Examination**



**Shailendra Handa**



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## **EXCELLING IN INTERVIEWS: A Complete Guide**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shailendra Handa

**S**hailendra Handa is a retired 1980 batch officer of Indian Revenue Service (I.T). He studied in Delhi University where he did Botany (Hons.) and LL.B. in 1978. He also worked in Indian Forest Service for 2 years before joining IRS. During his career in IRS he worked in various cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Pune.

He has always had a keen interest in training young minds and has served as Additional DG at National Academy of Direct Taxes, Nagpur which is the premier training institute for IRS officers. Post retirement, he also worked as Member, Settlement Commission, Ministry of Finance in Delhi for over 2 years.

He has a rich experience of training, coaching and mentoring youngsters for competitive exams., as also the UPSC selected officer trainees for working efficiently in Civil Services.

He has always had a keen interest in sports and played many games including Cricket, Football, Table Tennis, Badminton and Bridge. He also served as a Cricket Umpire, on panel of BCCI, at First Class level in Ranji Trophy matches.

**“Dedicated to everyone who strives for continuous self-improvement”**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.*

**John F. Kennedy**

Writing a book was a childhood dream and I found the right people in this world who helped me in making it a reality.

This book is a big Thank You to my wife Arti – my colleague, friend and batchmate in service – who provided matchless inspiration, support and valuable inputs during the process...but unfortunately could not live to see it in print.

Thanks are specially due to my daughter Rini – she too is in Civil Services – who provided continuous encouragement as well as contemporary technical inputs in my first effort.

Last, but certainly not the least, I personally wish to thank all my colleagues, sitting with me in mock Interview Panels over the years, and all those candidates/students who were interviewed by us, thus enriching my own understanding of the subject in this process of continuous learning.

**Shailendra Handa**

# INTRODUCTION

**W**e spend the most important parts of our lives working, so the more satisfying our work is, the more enjoyable our life will become. The purpose of this book is to help you prepare for that 'all important' Interview which will get you the career of your choice. Whether you are a fresh graduate from the University or an experienced worker facing lack of job satisfaction or fulfilment of your potential in the present job, this book will inform and inspire you to your future success.

“ *Find a job you like and you add five days to every week*

– H. Jackson Brown ”

During the course of a long career in civil services I often heard an important phrase

‘Life is an enquiry and then we die.’

Having had some good experience in training of individuals and related domain of HRD, I often came across people during their service career, as well as towards the end of it, saying “I wish I had the courage to live a life as I wanted to, not the life others expected of me.”

Working in Staff Development, designing training, coaching, mentoring and motivating people enjoy their work, enabled me to make a contribution in a way very different from the usual life of a bureaucrat. During my own career I have been interviewed many times for a variety of jobs, also had opportunities of sitting on interview panels, run training courses involving multiple skills in intellectual and social/emotional spheres for the officers and staff - and all those regular activities that necessarily go with such projects. Though a bit surprising to many of my colleagues, to me it turned out to be the most rewarding aspect of my work in a career of almost 4 decades - inspiring people to combine a zeal for quality work, with enjoyment and other goals of life, and to do it with confidence so that they do well in all their endeavours.

It is possible that you are reading this book before having got a call for Interview. If that be so, you are doing the right thing – thinking ahead with a positive frame of mind and getting well prepared. Sooner or later this preparation will stand you in good stead.

**Getting the best out of this book** would necessarily require giving yourself time and space for reflecting on and evaluating your past and current experiences as well as planning for the next time with a greater sense of objectivity and renewed focus on high priority areas.

**This book would be useful in understanding:**

- The basic features of a Personality Test / Interview
- Importance and weight age of knowledge in Interview / Personality test
- Relevance of hard work

- The right approach for preparation
- Honesty vs Smartness
- Ideology vs Practical approach
- All about 'attitude'
  - ♦ what is attitude?
  - ♦ what is its scope?

***How can one develop positive attitude?***

***How can attitudes be tested?***

***Making right attitude a habit, a way of life.***

**Self Confidence** is one area that would be an essential ingredient in your preparation for the road to success and surely the most crucial contribution to your confidence would be made by the knowledge and belief that you are sufficiently prepared.

**And Confidence is....** "Confidence is a funny thing ; people often say that you need luck to win. But for me, confidence comes down to preparation. I took two deep breaths, eyed the corner of the net and emptied my mind of everything else except one thought 'I am going to score'. There was one focus; there was no doubt in my mind, no negativity, just a sense of complete reassurance". (*David Beckham – The Illustrated Book, 2013*)

The often used technique of **Positive Mental Rehearsal** would further help you seeing yourself at 'the big stage' on the D-day and sounding confident, answering the questions well and smiling. It is this technique that was used by Boxing legend Mohamed Ali while preparing for his fights – by visualising his success with such detail, clarity and focus, that he could predict accurately when his opponent would go down after his knockout punch. It was a very successful strategy and it worked for him in 14 out of his 17 title fights.

- This book is primarily intended for the students appearing in Civil Services Examination of India, conducted by UPSC, where interview is called the 'Personality Test ' and aims at evaluating the all round personality of a candidate. As this exam is a highly competitive one, difference of even a few marks is often crucial in determining the career path of a candidate, so to say the course of life ahead in the years and decades to follow.
- The book would also be relevant for various other competitive examinations viz. State Public Service Commissions' exams. Bank P.O. and other similar examinations.
- My gratitude and special thanks to all those who gave me the experience of being interviewed and then continued to provide me with the feedback of their learning, as well as later life experiences.
- Invitation to all my readers for constructive criticism / suggestions / feedback so as to give me an opportunity to reflect upon my own understanding of the subject and improve my level and direction of thinking.

*Wishing an enjoyable experience and grand success to all sincere aspirants*

# 1

## CHAPTER

# PERSONALITY TEST : UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

## 1.1 Nature and Style of Civil Services Examination

**Nature and Style of Civil Services Examination** is unique in itself. A wide range testing Preliminary, an exhaustive mains aimed at testing in-depth knowledge as well as skills of writing, and then a Personality Test for which UPSC itself says - that the objective of this test is not to test the knowledge of the candidate, which has already been tested in the written examination. Well, it is nowhere laid down as to what exactly is expected of a candidate and what are the parameters/yardstick of a good personality. To make it more complicated, there are no guidelines to suggest as to how precisely they are going to test it. And yet, years of experience has shown us the trend/s and a more or less standardised recipe for success.

In Civil Services Exam., with 275 marks dedicated to Personality Test, surely ***you cannot afford to leave it to chance.*** It is often said that your performance in the mains determines your selection and that in the Personality Test decides the service. The good news is that Interviews of Competitive exams are not for selection or rejection but only for deciding the overall merit and in the process you select yourself. As such, 'do your best' is more applicable here than anywhere else. And with all those tags of 'unpredictability'/luck factor attached to it, it only goes to make you ponder and resolve that I must take up all that I can do to ensure that it will be 'my day'.

Before we start discussing the nuances of a good personality, process of a typical Personality Test and the strategy for handling it to your advantage, let me compare it with an example from the world of sports - to lay down the '***mantra for success***'.

Let us compare it to a Tennis match where the secret of success would be from-

- A good beginning - service and return of service
- a consistent mid-game
- occasional winners and above all, minimum unforced errors.

And all through, the importance of 'temperament' cannot surely be over emphasised. Just as the difference in skills amongst top players today is negligible, the difference in personality amongst UPSC qualifiers is also very little.

And that goes to define 'mantra' for success as - adhere strictly to the basics

- Prepare well
- Believe in yourself
- Do your best and ....move ahead.



Keep enjoying the good news that you have cleared written exam. And here is a real opportunity to get selected.

## 1.2 What does Personality here Really Mean?

Extensive research on the subject tells us that result of most Interviews is decided in first few minutes – and people rarely change their first opinion. Does it mean that it all depends on difficulty level and your replies to first set of questions?

No, certainly not. The people sitting in the Board are not there to test your knowledge and make it an exercise of chance or luck. They are there to judge your attributes, listed below, and in the process consciously observe your non-verbal communication, pleasantness, enthusiasm, warmth, positive energy etc.

Now let us make an effort to understand what personality means in this context.

It is nothing but an expression of:

- Ability to listen, grasp and analyse in quick time
- Clarity of thought
- Simplicity of expression
- Absolute honesty and Integrity
- A balanced mind with objectivity
- Ability to use/apply knowledge
- Awareness of day to day happenings including socio-economic issues of society.

In addition to this any Interview Board would like to test a candidate for: