

Recruiting the Right Mindset

- About the Making of the Inaugural Youth Olympic Games 2010 -

By Amy BC Tan

There are several invaluable lessons learnt during the different phases of YOG. A significant task has been the recruitment, preparation and motivation of more than five hundred staff and of more than twenty thousand volunteers within a timeframe of less than two years.

It is not new that recruiting people means evaluating, finding skills and experience that make up the eligibility – the aptitude – on the one hand and the suitability – the attitude – on the other hand. However, it is commonly much easier to evaluate the former in detail whilst neglecting the latter.

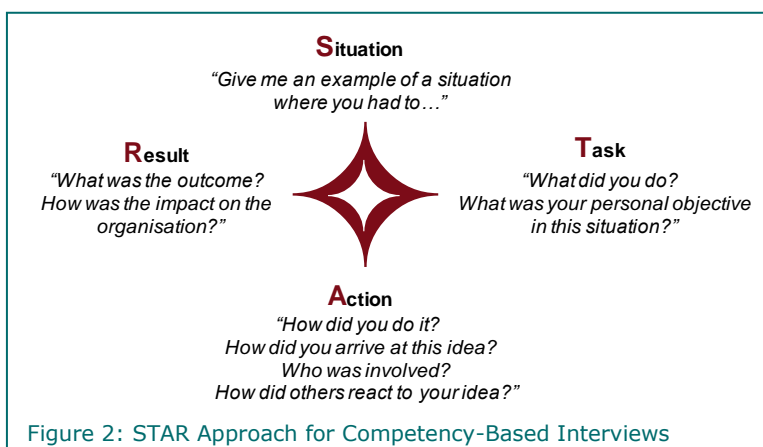
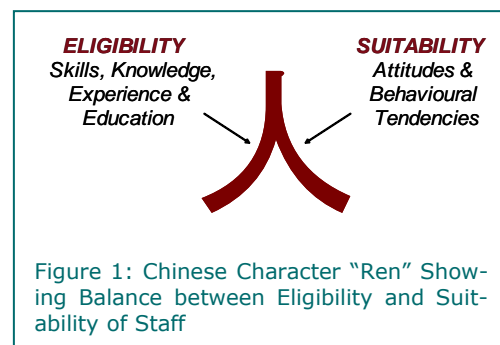
Identifying the right staff for YOG was a rather challenging task. This is partially due to the fact that YOG is not a long-term career but a merely short-term project. YOG does not offer career progression. Even worse, the job at YOG does not offer anything for the time after the Closing Ceremony apart from some weeks of housekeeping and wrap up work.

Therefore, it became apparent that finding people with the right mindset is at least as important as hiring the skills needed. Our approach to identify staff who could live up to our core values involved competency-based interviewing and selection techniques. Adapting the Olympic values excellence, friendship and respect and complementing them with our own values commitment, teamwork and integrity was one of the very first tasks in the Organising Committee done during focus group sessions with employees at a very early stage.

As a next step, we translated these values into attributes we identified as vital for fulfilling our vision for Singapore 2010 – Inspiring Youth and Creating a sporting Singapore. These attributes are Adaptability/Flexibility, Creativity, Communication, Decision Making, Problem Solving & Judgment, Initiative, Interpersonal Skills, Leadership, Passion, Planning & Organising, Reliability, Resilience/Tenacity, Service Orientation, Supervising & Developing Others and Tolerance for Ambiguity. All

staff had been informed about these indicators by ways of face-to-face communication and via email.

Values and Attributes together form the set of competencies that – apart from technical and functional competencies – were used to shape the team of the organising committee. All recruitments were done by making use of our Competency-Based Interview Guide after its



completion. Directors and managers were trained in applying the Interview Guide using the right set of questions. Before each interview, the hiring manager had to fill in a job description comprising of Role Purpose, Role Responsibility as well as Essential Attributes and Technical/Functional Competencies required for fulfilling the role.

Our Competency-Based Interview Guide includes a comprehensive set of indicators and questions for all six values and fourteen desired attributes.

For example, the value Commitment embodies the following indicators:

- Demonstrates physical and mental stamina to achieve results taking into account cost, timeliness, impact and quality, despite multiple demands
- Makes the effort to deliver significant results
- Is determined in his/her work and gets significant results
- Continuously strives for improving processes and services.
- Assesses the situation and commits quickly to a course of action even in a ambiguous situations or where information is incomplete
- Makes and stands by tough decisions that embrace the mission and values of SYOGOC even if they are unpopular or controversial
- Is passionate about what he/she is doing

The set of questions for Commitment is therefore:

- Tell me about a time when you had to maintain high work rate for an extended period. What did you do to remain productive and motivated?
- What things tend to fluster you when a deadline is near?
- We do not only receive positive feedback from our superiors. Can you tell me about the last time you received negative feedback from your superior? How did this make you feel? How did you respond?
- What activities in your current role require the most effort? What do you do to maintain your effectiveness?
- Describe a time when you were under pressure to make a decision! How did you react? How did you feel?

The questions are to be asked following the STAR model (Figure 2), i.e. they ask for **Situations** the applicant was previously in when the desired behaviour was needed. Further questions ask for the **Tasks** he/she had to fulfil, the way the task was completed – the **Actions** taken – as well as the **Results** for the applicant and his organisation.

Conclusion

Although, it seems like a mammoth task to build a comprehensive set of competencies describing desired values and attributes and cast this into a “Manager’s Guide to Competency-Based Interviewing” including introductory and training sessions for a project that only lasts about two years, it has paid off! The quality of staff hired using this guide was significantly improved. Whilst some early hires turned out to be a rather bad fit, the people we got on board later embodied the attitudes we were striving for.

Every organisation that is serious about portraying its own values deserves such approach.