

The race for skilled resources is on

SUMAN SAHA

THE banking sector in Bangladesh is thriving. It hires a large number of people every year to serve its growing customer base. Nowadays, a large number of job aspirants want to build a career in banking as it offers structural learning options as well as competitive pay packages.

Job seekers are always trying to find the secret to becoming a successful banker. Human resources (HR) experts in the banking sector say theoretical knowledge, computing ability, excellent communication skills, the right customer service attitude and an ability to work in a team are the keys to success here.

"A person aspiring for a banking career should have sufficient theoretical knowledge on finance and accounting as well as excellent communication skills, coupled with good computing ability because it is the most essential competence for a successful banker," says Monjurul Alam, senior HR manager at Eastern Bank Ltd.

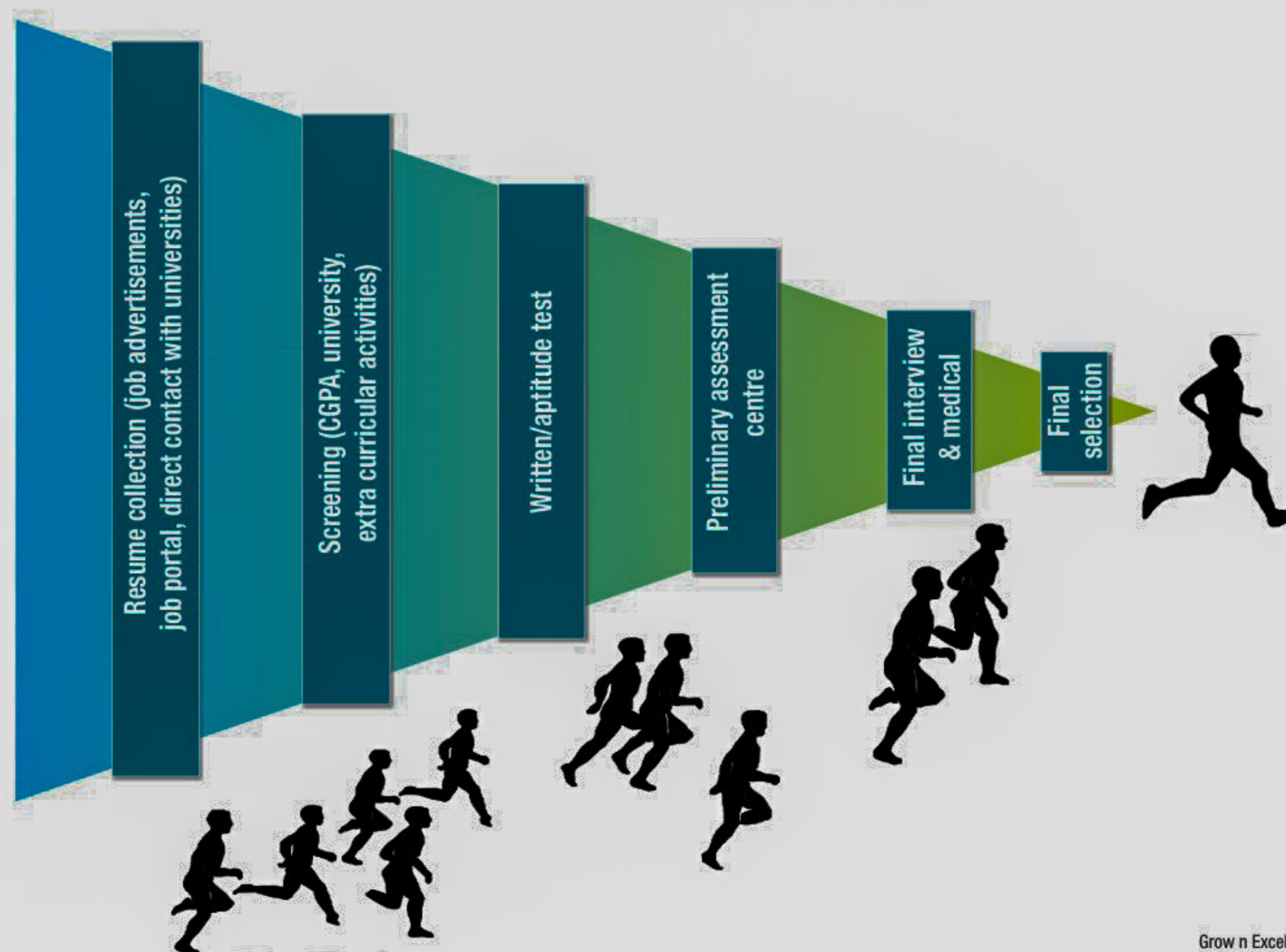
The person should also be customer oriented, possess a high standard of discipline, and always strive to add value to the bottom line of business, he adds.

Alam, who has over 12 years of experience in different HR roles, says, "Bankers have to possess these skills because they act as a development agent between different groups of people and also facilitate the reparation of other sectors of an economy like exports and imports."

A bank is a financial intermediary. A commercial bank accepts deposits and channels the deposits into lending activities by segmenting their customers into different categories like consumer, corporate and SME.

Banks provide a huge range of services to its customers, including ATM; debit and credit cards; locker services; special deposit plans; loans for house building, purchasing cars, study and even marriage.

Recent market trends show that



Grow n Excel

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financial service providing companies, especially the banking institutions, hire over 2,000 employees a year for entry level positions to reach out to the rural areas.

For an entry-level position, banks generally hire employees from external sources. They start the recruitment process by publishing job advertisements in newspapers and online job portals.

Next, they shortlist potential employees based on the qualities they are looking for and described on the job advertisement. Later, they take written tests and a couple of interviews to evaluate the candidates' skills.

Md Tabarak Hossain Bhuiyan, executive vice president and head of HR at Prime Bank Ltd, says, "We hire around 150 management trainee officers (MTO) a year for entry level positions by pursuing a structured

recruitment procedure."

Prime Bank recruits MTOs through a third party. Bhuiyan says Institute of Business Administration of Dhaka University generally performs the recruitment procedure -- from setting questions for the written test to sorting candidates for the final interview.

"We usually recruit business graduates for the MTO position as their curriculums match the banking related subjects; so they can learn quickly."

"But, we do not discriminate against any public or private university because our written test is open for all universities," Bhuiyan says.

In the interviews, Prime Bank tries to judge the candidate's aptitude skills and passion for pursuing a career in the banking sector.

"We try to judge the candidate's passion for this profession. Many want to pursue a banking career as a

last resort because they do not have a job in his or her desired field," says the head of HR at Prime Bank. "But, we prefer to hire those who have great passion for banking."

Mujib A Siddiqui, senior vice president and head of HR at Dhaka Bank Ltd, says, "We hire around 50-70 management trainees a year through a structured procedure and the bank usually takes written test in a GMAT format."

In the last batch, Dhaka Bank hired around 70 management trainees from 17,000 applicants through rigorous assessment, said Siddiqui.

The Dhaka Bank HR head urges future banking leaders to focus on developing communication skills to serve customers effectively.

Siddiqui says, "We nurture and develop our talent pool in a systematic way. The bank has a career development tool for each employee, to

assess one's strength and weakness."

Based on the assessment, the bank provides different types of training, such as technical, general management, general mathematics and computing skills, through its own training institute, he adds.

Eastern Bank also has strong learning and development programmes for the young talents and they receive extra attention from management, says Alam.

"We just do not give them a job, we shape their career," says Alam. "Training is an area where we give extra effort to create future leaders."

Alam says, "Eastern Bank has excellent performance management programmes as its pay benefits are linked to performance."

Industry insiders say the banking sector has been facing a few challenges in recruiting human resources.

"One of the greatest challenges for sourcing human resources in the banking sector is a scarcity of skilled people," says Alam. "We have a huge supply of degree holders with very high grades. But in the interview sessions, they can't prove their potential."

This is because today's students are working on only CGPA (cumulative grade point average); they do not understand the importance of real learning, says Alam. "Good grades are important, of course. But it would be better if the candidates could sell the degree before an interview board."

The scarcity of resources results in another big issue -- high attrition rates.

Because of the huge gap in demand for good resources in the banking sector and supply, the large banks compete against one another to attract promising candidates, says Alam.

So, they are just poaching people from one place to another, he adds.

It is difficult to design a retention policy where the industry is in an unfair race to take away other's resources, Alam says.

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Compete with yourself

The HR chief at BAT Bangladesh digs out the attributes that matter the most

SUMAN SAHA

Syed Imtiaz Faruque, head of human resources (HR) of British American Tobacco (BAT) in Bangladesh, boasts a career in several HR roles, possessing both national and international exposure. He joined BAT Bangladesh in 1998 as a management trainee and has successfully performed a range of HR roles. He worked for BAT Korea as organisation development manager in 2005 and BAT Cambodia as head of HR in 2007.

Faruque had been a key member of the ASPAC Talent Sourcing project from 2005 till 2007. He returned to BAT Bangladesh and joined his present role in May 2008. He recently shared his views with The Daily Star on the recruitment and talent development procedures of BAT. Faruque also gives tips on how to pursue a good career.

What are the leadership styles and management practices at BAT Bangladesh?

It is difficult to put a label on our leadership style or management practices. What describe us most accurately are our four guiding principles: open mindedness, enterprising spirit, strength from diversity and freedom through responsibility. These shape our organisational as well as individual styles and practices. Having the right set of functional and leadership capabilities are the basics for us and it is given that everyone should demonstrate the guiding principles that dictate who is a better leader.

Describe the company's recruitment procedure.

It is a five-step process. Once the CV screening is done and a candidate is shortlisted, s/he is invited for an in depth preliminary interview, which typically lasts about an hour. Candidates successfully passing the interview are then put through an assessment centre, which is a day-



Syed Imtiaz Faruque

long activity for entry level positions and half-day for mid career candidates. The successful candidates are then placed for a final interview that is followed by a medical examination.

What are your priorities in hiring fresh graduates?

Our talent pipeline is predominantly built with fresh graduates joining at an entry level and then growing with us. However, this by no way means that we have a closed mind about hiring 'mid careers'. We do hire mid careers quite a lot as well when the business needs so, either for skills or for talent pipeline driven reasons.

What attributes should a job aspirant need to acquire to build a career at a multinational company like BAT?

Most multinational companies like to have talent in their fleet who calibrate to their respective global standards. The selection processes and criteria, hence, are globally standardised. We name things differently in different organisations, but we all look for talent with the right functional or technical skills and most importantly, the right set of leadership skills.

Leadership, for these purposes, are not limited to how one interacts with and/or leads people only, but also covers how one manages himself or herself, clarity of thinking and action, creativity, commercial mindset and understanding. Language also plays an important role. Working in a multinational company means a lot of regular interaction with colleagues sitting in other countries. English language proficiency, both written and spoken, hence is critical.

How do you develop and nurture the talent pool?

There is a very strong off-the job training and development system at BAT. This includes internal and external training in Bangladesh and global training programmes. Factory employees are also sent to offshore premises of the original machine manufacturers for training. As a result, there is a higher proportion of on-the job development (for example, short-term attachments, long-term secondments, which are a 2-year posting in another country, projects and coaching from line manager) for anyone at BAT.

The careers of our best talents are also carefully planned so that they can go through experiences that are critical for them to be able to perform at a more senior level with very high standards.

Why are training and development important for a company, and how much money does BAT in Bangladesh spend on it?

It is important for a few simple reasons. First, the external world changes and you need employees to be updated with new skills. Second, consumer preferences change and you need employees to learn the skills to be able to continuously keep consumers delighted. Third, it is a world of fierce competition in business, so you want employees to have unique skills that will keep your business ahead of competition.

Finally, we all aspire to grow and hence, you need to help the employees grow personally and professionally through development interventions.

In 2010, our training budget was approximately 1.5 percent of total operating expenses. Apart from the financial costs, a lot of managerial time and resources are involved in the training and development process.

What would you suggest for job-aspirants to build a successful career?

My suggestions are:

Get your priorities right: It is easy and usual to be motivated by money, but don't trade that off with learning opportunities as well as the environment.

Money quickly becomes a hygiene factor once you start earning it; learning and the work environment are things that keep you going everyday.

Work hard: You need to work harder than you did yesterday. Exceed yourself and compete only with yourself, no one else.

Learn leadership: Senior roles are about leadership and one can not get there or perform a senior role with high standards without being a great leader.

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