

ST-SMU Future of Work

# How to land a job in Google

In the third of a four-part series on the future of work, Google's vice-president for staffing and operations Sunil Chandra talks about what employers look for when scouting for the best talents from around the world.

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Singaporean Muhammad Mohsin admits to being awed by the work environment and staff perks provided by his employer Google, when he started work as a software engineer at Mountain View, California, four years ago.

Who wouldn't – with perks like stock options, massage rooms, nap pods, laundry services and mechanics for your car on site? If you didn't have a car, there were commuting shuttles with Wi-Fi on board.

The numerous restaurants, cafes, juice bars, microkitchens and pantries appear to confirm the rumoured "150-foot rule" that stipulates no "Googler" should be farther than this distance from a food outlet.

He has also received and awarded "peer bonuses", where Googlers can arrange for the company to pay surprise bonuses – to show appreciation to a colleague who went beyond the call of duty.

But what drew the Singapore Management University (SMU) graduate to Google, and still excites him, goes beyond perks.

"You get to work with really smart, driven people. And despite being so smart, they are always ready to help – what we call 'Googlyness'."

"Plus, and this is a big plus – you get to do really interesting work," says the 34-year-old, who set up two start-ups developing phone applications after graduating from SMU with an information systems management degree.

He had tried for a job at Google as a fresh graduate, but got a call only three years later after Google saw a mobile game he had developed and put online.

He is a member of the team working on G Board, the keyboard that lets users search and send information, GIFs, emojis and more, as they type.

The office culture and impressive staff perks helped Google nab the top spot in Fortune's annual list of the 100 best companies to work for – again – just two weeks ago.

The company, which employs 72,000 people worldwide, including 1,000 in Singapore, has been named the top workplace for the sixth straight year. It's the eighth time in 11 years that Google has topped the list.

So, how does one land a job with

the world's best employer?

Will top grades and a degree from a top university help one stand out from the two million to three million who apply for a job at Google every year?

Google's vice-president for staffing and operations Sunil Chandra gives a firm "No".

He says Google has used data analytics for years to figure out how to hire people with the right fit.

"There is no correlation between our good hires and the universities that they come from or their GPAs," says the Australian-trained engineer, quickly adding that he is not encouraging anyone aiming for a job at Google to drop out of college.

He explains further: "Just because you did well in university, it does not mean that you are intellectually curious and you have skills and passion to produce great products, which is what Google is looking for."

What about the impossibly difficult and punishing brain teasers that Google is famous for?

The company once plastered a maths equation on a billboard that read: "{first 10-digit prime found in consecutive digits e}.com."

Other teasers include: "How many aeroplanes are in the sky right now?" and "How many golf balls would fit inside a 747?"

According to Mr Chandra, teasers are a waste of time.

"If you are an interviewer, they are a fun thing to ask. But there is actually no correlation to the hiring outcome."

He goes on to what it is that Google looks for.

Ability is important, though it is not academic ability that the company looks for, but problem-solving ability.

He explains: "The problems and the context will keep changing, but what Google looks for is the right attitude and ability to decode problems and solve them."

The second thing that the hirers look for is role-related – essentially, whether you have the skills required to do the job.

"So if you're an engineer, can you code? If you are aiming for a sales position, can you come up with some effective sales strategies?"

Third is leadership.

Mr Chandra explains: "If you are a more senior person, we want to know if you have created great teams. If you are just starting off in your career, are you the kind of person who finds a problem and says, 'I'm going to solve it.'"



Google's vice-president for staffing and operations Sunil Chandra says Google has used data analytics for years to hire people with the right fit. The company also uses hiring panels, including many of its employees, to interview applicants. PHOTO: THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

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"So you could be in school or university and you say, 'you know what, I don't know why these cords are always hanging loose, I'm going to clean them up myself.' That's taking charge and leading."

"It's a natural desire to want to make a difference and to be able to inspire other folk to come along with you. It's innate leadership versus leadership that is granted because this is your position."

He stresses that this quality is important, because the tech giant wants its employees "to look at things we do, the way we do them, and tell us how we can do it better."

The final thing is the "Googlyness" that Mr Muhammad referred to – a combination of passion and drive and being a good team player.

To find this, Mr Chandra says they look for people who work well in teams and have innate curiosity.

"Are you someone who just wants to know more about stuff? You have to be very curious about

## BIO

Mr Sunil Chandra, vice-president of staffing and operations at Google, leads the team responsible for all of Google's hiring, outreach programmes and operations.

The team is responsible for finding the best talents for Google – from university campuses through to experienced candidates with deep domain expertise.

The operations teams are responsible for making sure that Google's people processes run like clockwork across all offices and

teams. The business intelligence and reporting teams bring the data that informs recruitment and staff development.

Prior to joining Google, Mr Chandra was the chief operating officer for technology at Barclays Capital, where he helped build the global services group in Singapore, and director of administration at McKinsey & Co.

He has a computer engineering degree from the University of Wollongong and an MBA from the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia.

represent our users, there's no way for us to build great products."

Any advice for young people aspiring to work for great companies like Google?

They must use their time in university well, he says.

"Discover who you are, what you're excited about. Don't focus on just one thing for the three or four years and do stuff. If you're really fascinated by computers, write some code, build an app. If you're really excited by cooking, go to cooking classes. If you really want to help others, join a volunteer organisation, because employers are interested in the whole person, not just in your degree."

He admits that Google uses an inordinate amount of resources and people in recruiting and developing the right talents. He says one great employee is worth a lot to the company.

"We are in an age where a single person with a huge amount of passion and skills can go create apps and products that are used by billions of people."

"That is the kind of person that all employers, including Google, look for – one with the right skills, talent and drive."

"It's good to go to university to gain knowledge, but what counts at the end of the day is what you can do with what you know."

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