

## How to Get a Job at Google

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MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. — LAST June, in an interview with Adam Bryant of The Times, Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations for Google — i.e., the guy in charge of hiring for one of the world's most successful companies — noted that Google had determined that “G.P.A.’s are worthless as a criteria for hiring, and test scores are worthless. ... We found that they don’t predict anything.” He also noted that the “proportion of people without any college education at Google has increased over time” — now as high as 14 percent on some teams. At a time when many people are asking, “How’s my kid gonna get a job?” I thought it would be useful to visit Google and hear how Bock would answer.

Don’t get him wrong, Bock begins, “Good grades certainly don’t hurt.” Many jobs at Google require math, computing and coding skills, so if your good grades truly reflect skills in those areas that you can apply, it would be an advantage. But Google has its eyes on much more.

“There are five hiring attributes we have across the company,” explained Bock. “If it’s a technical role, we assess your coding ability, and half the roles in the company are technical roles. For every job, though, the No. 1 thing we look for is general cognitive ability, and it’s not I.Q. It’s learning ability. It’s the ability to process on the fly. It’s the ability to pull together disparate bits of information. We assess that using structured behavioral interviews that we validate to make sure they’re predictive.”

The second, he added, “is leadership — in particular emergent leadership as opposed to traditional leadership. Traditional leadership is, were you president of the chess club? Were you vice president of sales? How quickly did you get there? We don’t care. What we care about is, when faced with a problem and you’re a member of a team, do you, at the appropriate time, step in and lead. And just as critically, do you step back and stop leading, do you let someone else? Because what’s critical to be an effective leader in this environment is you have to be willing to relinquish power.”

What else? Humility and ownership. "It's feeling the sense of responsibility, the sense of ownership, to step in," he said, to try to solve any problem — and the humility to step back and embrace the better ideas of others. "Your end goal," explained Bock, "is what can we do together to problem-solve. I've contributed my piece, and then I step back."

And it is not just humility in creating space for others to contribute, says Bock, it's "intellectual humility. Without humility, you are unable to learn." It is why research shows that many graduates from hotshot business schools plateau. "Successful bright people rarely experience failure, and so they don't learn how to learn from that failure," said Bock.

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"They, instead, commit the fundamental attribution error, which is if something good happens, it's because I'm a genius. If something bad happens, it's because someone's an idiot or I didn't get the resources or the market moved. ... What we've seen is that the people who are the most successful here, who we want to hire, will have a fierce position. They'll argue like hell. They'll be zealots about their point of view. But then you say, 'here's a new fact,' and they'll go, 'Oh, well, that changes things; you're right.' " You need a big ego and small ego in the same person at the same time.

The least important attribute they look for is "expertise." Said Bock: "If you take somebody who has high cognitive ability, is innately curious, willing to learn and has emergent leadership skills, and you hire them as an H.R. person or finance person, and they have no content knowledge, and you compare them with someone who's been doing just one thing and is a world expert, the expert will go: 'I've seen this 100 times before; here's what you do.' " Most of the time the nonexpert will come up with the same answer, added Bock, "because most of the time it's not that hard." Sure, once in a while they will mess it up, he said, but once in a while they'll also come up with an answer that is totally new. And there is huge value in that.

To sum up Bock's approach to hiring: Talent can come in so many different forms and be built in so many nontraditional ways today, hiring officers have to be alive to every one — besides brand-name colleges. Because "when you look at people who don't go to school and make their way in the world, those are exceptional human beings. And we should do everything we can to find those people." Too many colleges, he added, "don't deliver on what they promise. You generate a ton of debt, you don't learn the most useful things for your life. It's [just] an extended adolescence."

Google attracts so much talent it can afford to look beyond traditional metrics, like G.P.A. For most young people, though, going to college and doing well is still the best way to master the tools needed for many careers. But Bock is saying something important to them, too: Beware. Your degree is not a proxy for your ability to do any job. The world only cares about — and pays off on — what you can do with what you know (and it doesn't care how you learned it). And in an age when innovation is increasingly a group endeavor, it also cares about a lot of soft skills — leadership, humility, collaboration, adaptability and loving to learn and re-learn. This will be true no matter where you go to work.

## How to Get a Job at Google, Part 2

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 [nytimes.com/2014/04/20/opinion/sunday/friedman-how-to-get-a-job-at-google-part-2.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/opinion/sunday/friedman-how-to-get-a-job-at-google-part-2.html)

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. — HOW'S my kid going to get a job? There are few questions I hear more often than that one. In February, I interviewed Laszlo Bock, who is in charge of all hiring at Google — about 100 new hires a week — to try to understand what an employer like Google was looking for and why it was increasingly ready to hire people with no college degrees. Bock's remarks generated a lot of reader response, particularly his point that prospective bosses today care less about what you know or where you learned it — the Google machine knows everything now — than what value you can create with what you know. With graduations approaching, I went back to Google to ask Bock to share his best advice for job-seekers anywhere, not just at Google. Here is a condensed version of our conversations:

You're not saying college education is worthless?

"My belief is not that one shouldn't go to college," said Bock. It is that among 18- to 22-year-olds — or people returning to school years later — "most don't put enough thought into why they're going, and what they want to get out of it." Of course, we want an informed citizenry, where everyone has a baseline of knowledge from which to build skills. That is a social good. But, he added, don't just go to college because you think it is the right thing to do and that any bachelor's degree will suffice. "The first and most important thing is to be explicit and willful in making the decisions about what you want to get out of this investment in your education." It's a huge investment of time, effort and money and people should think "incredibly hard about what they're getting in return."

Once there, said Bock, make sure that you're getting out of it not only a broadening of your knowledge but skills that will be valued in today's workplace. Your college degree is not a proxy anymore for having the skills or traits to do any job.

What are those traits? One is grit, he said. Shuffling through résumés of some of Google's 100 hires that week, Bock explained: "I was on campus speaking to a student who was a computer science and math double major, who was thinking of shifting to an economics major because the computer science courses were too difficult. I told that student they are much better off being a B student in computer science than an A+ student in English because it signals a rigor in your thinking and a more challenging course load. That student will be one of our interns this summer."

Or, he added, think of this headline from The Wall Street Journal in 2011: "Students Pick Easier Majors Despite Less Pay." This was an article about a student who switched from electrical and computer engineering to a major in psychology. She said she just found the former too difficult and would focus instead on a career in public relations and human resources. "I think this student was making a mistake," said Bock, even if it meant lower grades. "She was moving out of a major where she would have been differentiated in the labor force" and "out of classes that would have made her better qualified for other jobs because of the training."

This is key for Bock because the first thing Google looks for "is general cognitive ability — the ability to learn things and solve problems," he said. In that vein, "a knowledge set that will be invaluable is the ability to understand and apply information — so, basic computer science skills. I'm not saying you have to be some terrific coder, but to just understand how [these] things work you have to be able to think in a formal and logical and structured way." But that kind of thinking doesn't have to come from a computer science degree. "I took statistics at business school, and it was transformative for my career. Analytical training gives you a skill set that differentiates you from most people in the labor market."

A lot of work, he added, is no longer tied to location. "So if you want your job tied to where you are, you need to be: A) quite good at it; and B) you need to be very adaptable so that you have a baseline skill set that allows

you to be a call center operator today and tomorrow be able to interpret MRI scans. To have built the skill set that allows you to do both things requires a baseline capability that's analytical."

Well, what about creativity?

Bock: "Humans are by nature creative beings, but not by nature logical, structured-thinking beings. Those are skills you have to learn. One of the things that makes people more effective is if you can do both. ... If you're great on both attributes, you'll have a lot more options. If you have just one, that's fine, too." But a lot fewer people have this kind of structured thought process *and* creativity.

Are the liberal arts still important?

They are "phenomenally important," he said, especially when you combine them with other disciplines. "Ten years ago behavioral economics was rarely referenced. But [then] you apply social science to economics and suddenly there's this whole new field. I think a lot about how the most interesting things are happening at the intersection of two fields. To pursue that, you need expertise in both fields. You have to understand economics and psychology or statistics and physics [and] bring them together. You need some people who are holistic thinkers and have liberal arts backgrounds and some who are deep functional experts. Building that balance is hard, but that's where you end up building great societies, great organizations."

How do you write a good résumé?

"The key," he said, "is to frame your strengths as: 'I accomplished X, relative to Y, by doing Z.' Most people would write a résumé like this: 'Wrote editorials for The New York Times.' Better would be to say: 'Had 50 op-eds published compared to average of 6 by most op-ed [writers] as a result of providing deep insight into the following area for three years.' Most people don't put the right content on their résumés."

What's your best advice for job interviews?

“What you want to do is say: ‘Here’s the attribute I’m going to demonstrate; here’s the story demonstrating it; here’s how that story demonstrated that attribute.’ ” And here is how it can create value. “Most people in an interview don’t make explicit their thought process behind how or why they did something and, even if they are able to come up with a compelling story, they are unable to explain their thought process.”

For parents, new grads and those too long out of work, I hope some of this helps.