

# EXAMPLE REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT

## Work and Employability Certificate

### October 2010

By xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

#### RUBRIC

The reflective account provides an opportunity for you to bring together the learning you have gained through your work experience. The focus is on things that you have learnt that you believe will be useful to you when you enter your chosen professional field and more generally what you consider to be useful skills that will make you employable or self-employable. We are looking for a coherent account of about 2000-2500 words.

#### 1. CONTEXT:

*Description of the work you have undertaken, your responsibilities and the organization (about 500 words)*

##### Organisation

- Who were you working for? What does the organization do?
- What sort of work were you doing? / What were your responsibilities?
- What sort of people did you work with? (colleagues, clients, customers)
- How was the work organised? What did you learn about being part of an organisation?
- What were the main challenges you encountered and why?
- What sort of problems/issues did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

**Approximate amount of time (hrs) spent in the work environment**

#### 2. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: (about 1000 words)

*a) Please complete the skills and experiences checklist (item 4 below)*

*b) What were the most important things you learnt and developed? Relate your development to the capability statement. Be comprehensive and give examples of specific experiences/situations through which you learnt these things. You can draw directly from your reflective diary/blog.*

**Prompts – these relate to the capability and values statement underpinning the Certificate**

Managing and evaluating my own development

Being able to deal with situations, solve problems, work with challenge and take advantage of opportunity

Being able to find out what you need to know to do what you need to do

Being creative and enterprising

Being a good communicator

Being able to work with and lead others (including working with clients and customers)

Behaving ethically and with social responsibility

Other areas for personal development that are important to my role me, and which are not included in the above

My values and how they have been influenced

Confidence gained through working

#### 3. BEING AN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL? (up to 500 words)

What does it mean to be an effective professional, and how have your views been shaped by this work experience? Illustrate your account with specific examples of situations where you felt you behaved in a professional way or examples when you realized you were not able to perform in a manner that you believe was appropriate (learning from experiences that were not successful is as important as learning from situations that are).

#### 4. SKILLS & EXPERIENCES CHECKLIST

Please indicate with a ✓ the experiences and skills and personal development you actually gained and add comments to explain

**Why this account is offered as an example.** It contains an honest account of someone drawing significant learning from what the person considered to be a fairly ordinary job. Good features include:

- 1) All the criteria listed on the front page are addressed.
- 2) Good reference is made to the capability and values statement to draw out learning and personal development
- 3) There is a good balance between explanations of situations and contexts and evaluation of actions and the effects of actions. Within these descriptions there is a good level of self-awareness of successes and weaknesses and how the latter might be improved.
- 4) The diary provides a good running record of significant events that are later drawn on in the account. The stories demonstrate a good degree of reflective sense making of the situations encountered.
- 5) Good use is made of the skills and experiences checklist to provide examples of personal development.

## **1. Context**

XXXXXXXXXX are one of the UK's leading suppliers of building materials, stocking over 100,000 various products aimed to cater for all aspects of the trade, including plumbing and heating, construction and landscaping. The company itself aims to sell to the trade, with cash customers being welcomed and invited to sign up for a Trade Cash Card, offering them trade prices for their own DIY jobs.

I have worked for XXXXXXXXXXXXX since November 2006, and over this summer I have worked 349.5 hours, as of 11<sup>th</sup> September (see Appendix 2 and 3 for a confirmation email of hours worked and a scanned payslip). I was employed under the title of a Casual Labourer, which meant my hours were free to work whenever I was needed. As a result of this, my hours fluctuated week on week, as can be seen in my recorded hours.

### **My roles within XXXXXXXXXXXXX included:**

#### *Stock Control*

When a delivery was received, it is my job to mark off each item to ensure that we have received what was documented, and in the correct quantities. I also monitor the stock levels in the shop and, where necessary, move products from the overstock aisle to the shop floor. In addition to this, it is sometimes necessary for the stock levels on the system to be checked and amended, particularly where the system shows negative levels of stock. In such instances, I go and examine the products location and ensure that we either have none of the product in question (in which case more is ordered), or amend the stock levels to match that on the shelf.

#### *Customer Sales*

A large portion of my working time is spent behind the counter serving customers. Such service includes taking payment for products, settling outstanding balances on accounts and helping

customers locate certain products within the shop. In addition, I also aim to provide some assistance on general enquiries, or to refer the customer to the correct specialist within our store.

### *Supplier Interaction*

Occasionally times arise where I need to contact the supplier regarding certain details of their products. At such times, I phone the suppliers and make the enquiries, place orders and relay such information back to the relevant client.

### *Telephone Enquiries*

Often customers would phone the store from their site and request delivery of heavier products direct to their construction site. I answer the phones and take such orders, as well as helping to answer any questions they may have about our products and, where necessary, take numbers and messages to refer back to once the relevant information has been attained.

The majority of my time was spent in a sales environment, meaning that I most frequently interacted with a small sales team of 6 colleagues, as well as a number of customers that ranged in their field of specialisation. Given the environment that I was working in, work could be partially pre-empted, such as by estimating when we would receive a delivery. However, monitoring the stock levels was a continuous process, and customers would come in at their convenience, meaning that my work would be more spontaneous than organised.

Naturally, customers are a challenge in themselves. Customer enquiries are often a particular challenge for me, due to my lack of expert knowledge of the building industry. Over the past years, my knowledge has been able to expand and so I am now able to assist a greater number of customers in their requests, and occasionally seeking assistance from my colleagues. Rarely, customers will come in with a vague idea of what they want (such as a “stone paving slab”, of which we stock a number of varieties). In such cases, I can refer them to a relevant brochure or request the help of one of my more specialised colleagues, who will then assist me in serving the customer.

## ***2. Personal and Professional Development***

I feel that there have been three key areas that have benefitted from my time spent working at XXXXXXXXX this summer. These are:

- Communication
- Working with and leading others
- Dealing with situations including problem solving and taking advantage of opportunities

### *Communication*

This has possibly been the area that has most benefitted through my work over this summer, simply because of the nature of my work. There have been times over the summer where I have been

required to demonstrate my communication skills with customers, such as times where mistakes have been made and action was required immediately, to times where friendly banter would pass before taking a general sale.

Over the summer, I have been in a number of scenarios where I have been required to interact with clients over the phone, be it ordering new products or taking orders from customers. There have been a number of different cases where I have had my general communication skills tested, such as one instance where the customer had been on an extremely delicate line which made it incredibly difficult for me to interpret what it was that he wanted to order. Such calls couldn't be avoided, and as such it was through sheer persistence (and patience on the customer's part) that I was able to place the orders successfully.

Other than the difficult phone calls, I have been expected to take messages from customers when my colleagues have been busy. Initially, I used to take a number and forget to note the name of the client, or would only write the name but leave no number. Over the past months I have developed this particular skill, and now my standard procedure is to take a name, number and brief note detailing the reason for calling. It has been of particular use to my colleagues because it allowed them to prioritise their work better, leaving less vital queries until a less busy time and for the more urgent clients to be contacted immediately.

My confidence when dealing with new customers has also developed over the course of the summer, helping me to engage in friendly conversation with complete strangers regarding a variety of topics whilst processing their orders. Such confidence has been of incredible importance for me for I used to lack all forms of confidence following a rough period at high school which made it extremely difficult to speak to anyone I didn't know. Now, I find I have little trouble in speaking to strangers and I hope that my confidence will continue to grow over my years at University and in my placement year to come.

Communication within Xxxxxxxxxxx varied based on situation. For example, when a phone call was taken for another colleague I would need to leave a message, requiring me to write a note for my colleague detailing who the caller was and what the purpose of their call was. Other times I would engage in face to face communication with my colleagues, such as when requesting authorisation to refund goods or to seek assistance for a particularly difficult query. Occasionally I would directly call another colleague using the in store phones, such as when alerting them that they had a caller waiting.

Through speculation of such communication channels, I have learnt that it is essential for clear communication channels to be established between all members of staff, particularly between the sales staff and the delivery manager at Xxxxxxxxxxx, for there were many occasions when I was asked when the next available delivery slot was and we would have to make the customer wait while I looked around for the delivery manager to check with him when he could next make the delivery.

### *Working with and leading others*

Being able to work with others is a key aspect of being a professional, I feel. This opinion has largely been shaped by my work at XXXXXXXXXXXX, where I have been provided with numerous occasions where I have been required to work alongside my colleagues to complete certain tasks.

One such occasion was when I was tasked by my manager to reorganise the warehouse where we stored a number of our heavier goods such as toilets, sinks and baths, as well as large packs of flooring and so on. This project gave me free reign over where the products were placed, albeit with a couple of restrictions such as having to leave the centre free for forklifts to be parked. I proceeded to move the stock around, directing my colleague where necessary, as well as listening to his suggestions as to where certain products would be better located for ease of movement when they were sold.

Many tasks I completed whilst working at XXXXXXXXXXXX gave me the opportunity to work with a small team of people, such as when the larger deliveries arrived or when a new promotion arrived and required us to reorganise the shop to make room for a new display. Such small projects gave me a sense of what it is like to work within a small team, of the bonds that emerge from such work and it made me realise exactly how important it is that teams can cooperate with each other to ensure the smooth running of a project.

Our teams tended to feature 2-3 employees working on one specific task. For example, when the Head Office delivery came in, one colleague would call out the product codes for each product, I would mark that code off of the purchase order and a final colleague would put the marked off stock away. As a result of this, there was no clear "leader" for the team, because it was more of a group effort that required no individual to direct. However, in other circumstances, such as projects that required problem solving skills, a leader was necessary to ensure that we didn't all attempt to tackle the problem in our own ways.

Such work has provided me with a number of insights about what it is like to work as part of a team, and in my opinion I feel that the structure of any team should take into account what the actual project is, and how necessary it is for a leader to be assigned. In the case of the Head Office delivery, it was a regular occurrence so all colleagues knew how to complete the task and what roles they needed to adopt in order to complete the task quickly, making a leader role unnecessary. Having a leader could have potentially slowed down the task at hand by overcomplicating the task, perhaps by shuffling roles around or attempting to mark off the stock in a different manner, making the team less successful.

### *Dealing with Situations – Problem Solving and Taking Advantage of Opportunities*

Working in a customer sales environment provides numerous opportunities for personal skills to be improved, as I have discovered. Often, I have been provided with customers that show an interest in a specific type of product, and it has been left to me, the salesman, to direct the customer to the appropriate selection of products. In some cases, I had been faced with a customer who knew roughly what they wanted, but wanted me to recommend them the best range of products to meet their requirements. In such cases, I felt that I gained significant learning because I was able to compare what they wanted to what I knew we could supply, and at what price, and often was able to secure a number of high valued sales.

One such sale was for a customer who wanted to redesign their garden with a selection of paving slabs. The customer explained to me that she wanted to have a large patio area but wasn't sure about what specific colours she wanted or what design she wanted to have laid down. After some time I was able to provide her with a number of ranges that met her criteria, including a number of our premium ranges. My customer showed a significant amount of interest in the Indian Sandstone range which came in a project pack that would allow her to have the slabs laid down in a number of concentric circles. My client explained that she needed to get the paving slabs within a week, for she had a landscaper coming to oversee the rest of the garden's redesign, so I promptly contacted the suppliers to investigate lead times and was consequently able to take approximately £2000 for the sale, as well as receiving a thanks from the customer for my extremely helpful attitude.

Xxxxxxxxxx has established a system called "Merlin" on the intranet which aims to link sales with sales opportunities. I spent some time looking at the information provided and was interested to see how the system appeared to link certain products to other supplementary products. One item that I noticed frequently appeared was solvent cement, which was used to glue underground plastic pipe fittings together to the pipe. With this in mind, when I took sales for plumbing fittings I checked whether the customer had a pot of solvent cement and, if not, whether they would like to add some to their order. More often than not, the customer admitted that they had a pot in the van somewhere but took another one to "be sure".

Naturally, some opportunities passed me by, some causing me to miss out on a high value sale. One particularly expensive sale I missed out on was when a customer came in looking for a price list of our various timbers and tonne bags of ballast and shingle and the suchlike. After ascertaining that the customer didn't hold an account with us, I proceeded to give him the prices that would be charged to customers that were described as "cash customers", and were naturally more expensive than the "trade customer" rates that were set up. The customer was quite shocked that we were around 40p a metre more expensive than one of our largest competitors and began to leave when my colleague came over and rescued the sale. As it turned out, the gentleman was part of a large firm who were beginning a new building project nearby and were looking to purchase a large quantity of supplies from us – something that I had failed to enquire about before offering prices.

## ***Being an effective professional***

My views on what makes one a professional have undoubtedly changed over the past few years, and in some cases even more so over this summer. I feel that the key characteristics that demonstrate you are a professional are:

- A mature attitude; being able to draw a line between having a laugh whilst working and immaturity
- An open personality; being the sort of person who can meet a stranger with an open smile and engage and involve anyone in a conversation or project.
- A sense of humility; being able to admit mistakes and to learn from past mistakes to make more justified and informed decisions in the future
- A democratic countenance; being able to listen to other colleagues opinions when making a decision.
- A flexible nature; being able to adapt to changing situations

I feel that my placement over the summer has improved these characteristics within me, as well as improving my understanding of what I need to do to become a more effective professional. One significant improvement I feel I have made has been around my maturity, particularly regarding my ability to behave in a much more professional manner around the workplace, despite distractions.

My sense of humility has also been tested in a number of cases during my work throughout the summer. One particular instance that tested both my maturity and humility was when I made a severe mistake and charged a large order to the wrong account and, thus, nearly caused the delivery to be delivered to the wrong address.

The order was made during a particularly busy period, and as a result I didn't actually process the order until several hours after I had taken the call. The order, comprising of several tonnes of goods, was for a company whose name (YYYYYY) was strikingly similar to that of another account (YYYYYY). Over the duration of the call, the customer stated that he wanted the goods to be delivered to "the site where all your other deliveries have been going", and that he needed the delivery for first thing in two days time. I promised that, given the advance warning, we would easily be able to make his delivery a first drop.

Unfortunately, I didn't quite understand the logistics of the order, and consequently it transpired that the delivery manager wasn't able to make the delivery a first drop at all due to having one of his largest vehicles off the road for an MOT test. Undeterred, he managed to get the order out and I proceeded to contact the company to inform them of the delay. However, it turned out that I had placed the order to the wrong account, as the customer that picked up the phone didn't have any idea

what order I was talking about. Realising my mistake, I hurriedly informed the delivery manager who was able to recall the delivery while I contacted the correct company and informed them that their goods would be late. Naturally, they were not impressed and I was summoned to my manager's office for a brief talk about what I needed to improve to make sure this didn't happen again. This particular incident has been very important, as it helped me to realise that I needed to be able to admit mistakes in certain instances so as to provide better customer service and, due to this mistake, I haven't made such a severe mistake since.

Overall, this certificate has helped me to reflect on how I work and how I learn, and consequently it has helped me learn a number of valuable lessons that I hope will help me to become a far more professional individual when I come to undertaking my placement year next year.

### ***Skills and experiences checklist***

The table below details the knowledge, skills and qualities that I feel I have developed over the summer. Each area of development is shown in relation to the Capability and Values Statement (Appendix 1) and an explanation of each area of personal development is provided below.

#### *Explanatory Notes for Table 1*

1 – I encountered a number of situations that required me to challenge myself, both in terms of dealing with challenging customers and in problem solving. Such experiences have taught me how I should handle myself in such situations, so as to better act in a professional manner. My mistakes have greatly contributed to my learning too, showing me where I could have gone about undertaking a challenge in a different way to succeed.

2 – It is obvious that my work over the summer has been valuable for my future placements for I have learnt a number of lessons about how to be a better professional, in terms of how to behave, undertake tasks and how to work within a team.

3 – Much of my technical learning has been focused on the computer systems at XXXXXXXXXXXX, but some of the techniques I have learnt regarding the intranet could easily be used in a similar manner for another company – such as how to use the intranet to query a product or to look up another branches number.

4 – The job has greatly contributed to my understanding of what it means to be a professional, and some of my understanding has culminated in a more mature outlook, as well as helping me to develop a more analytical perspective when undertaking projects within a team.

5 – Working in customer sales has provided me with numerous opportunities to develop my oral skills, particularly through talking to a variety of customers and learning how to handle conversations with

various clients. My confidence has been one of the key areas that have benefitted from my work over the summer, helping me to engage in conversation with a greater variety of clients and in some cases helping me to take the first step when initiating conversation.

6 – In addition to my oral skills, my ability to listen has improved significantly this summer, I feel. Such improvement has come about through listening to feedback from my colleagues about completed tasks, listening to varied dialects from my clients, both in face to face speech and over the phone speech.

7 – The past few months have given me the opportunity to work as part of a team and, in a few instances, as the leader of a small team. Such experiences will undoubtedly be of importance to me in the future because they will help me to be a better team player, and hopefully will help me remember the mistakes I have seen my leaders make so as to help me avoid such mistakes when leading my own team.

8 – Interaction with customers and suppliers has been a significant part of my work experience this summer, and as such it is obvious that my manner when dealing with clients has benefitted tremendously. I feel that I have gained a far more professional manner when handling customers, which will be of incredible help in my placement year to come.

9 – Anger is one emotion that I have had to contend with on a number of occasions in my work, mainly due to aggravating clients at work. I had to contend with a condescending attitude on a number of occasions at work, due to my age, and as such I had to swallow my irritation when handling such customers to maintain a professional manner, which I hope reflected my true maturity. Being able to handle emotions is one thing that I feel is essential if I am to be a true professional, because a manager cannot afford to lose their rag with insolent clients, and a professional facade should be maintained at all times.

10 – My confidence, as previously mentioned, has been greatly improved over my work this summer. Experiences such as dealing with customers whom I have never met before have given me a greater amount of confidence and have helped me to engage in conversation with new people far more easily than I could before.

11 – As previously mentioned, I didn't interact with my line manager enormously due to his other duties that had to be completed. However, this, I found, worked extremely well as the assistant manager adopted the role of manager for the sake of the sales environment and was more than happy to assist wherever possible.

In addition to the assistant manager, there were also a number of other specialised job roles that my colleagues satisfied, for example the delivery manager, plumbing and heating manager and the

accountant/stock manager. This delegation of duties allowed the branch manager to focus on the general running of the branch, and I feel that such delegation is a useful factor to remember when considering the appropriate way to run a branch, for it takes into account the staff's skills to ensure that each job could be performed to its most efficient.

12 – Due to the flexibility of prices at XXXXXXXXXXXX, a lot of my time spent behind the counter was filled with a form of haggling with customers who were determined to get the best discount possible for them. Often, such haggling involved my negotiation, such as through suggesting that if they bought 5 Irwin saws they would receive a 60% discount, compared to the 10% discount they received currently. As a result, I feel that my negotiating skills have been improved marginally over the summer, in terms of negotiating prices with customers.

**Table 1 - Skills and experiences checklist**

<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>1 No new learning</b>	<b>2 Some new learning</b>	<b>3 Much new learning</b>	<b>4 Capability and values statement</b>	<b>5 Explanatory notes see above</b>
Finding and applying for a job	√				
Experience of being interviewed	√				
Learning about how an organization/business works		√		<b>3</b>	
Dealing with challenging situations at work			√	<b>2 &amp; 3</b>	<b>1</b>
Applying classroom learning		√			
Gaining valuable work experience			√	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Developing valuable technical skills eg computer systems at XXXXXXXXXXXX		√		<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>
Learning professional behaviors			√	<b>2</b>	<b>2 &amp; 4</b>
Developing communication skills Verbal/oral skills Listening Written eg reports/ Design eg posters Use of media eg photographs/video	√ √ √		√ √	<b>5</b> <b>5</b>	<b>5 &amp; 6</b>
Develop and use IT skills	√				
Learning how to work with colleagues or in a team			√	<b>6</b>	<b>4 &amp; 7</b>
Learning how to interact with customers or clients			√	<b>1, 2 &amp; 6</b>	<b>5 &amp; 8</b>
Learning about being managed		√		<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>
Learning how to manage others		√		<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
Learning how to manage yourself eg turning up on time	√				
Learning about business skills and practices.		√		<b>1 &amp; 2</b>	<b>2</b>
Coping with and managing emotions			√	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
Learning how to negotiate with and persuade others		√			<b>12</b>
Clarifying future career goals	√				
Being given challenging responsibilities		√			<b>1</b>
Being creative and resourceful to make things happen	√				
Experience of being enterprising	√				
Self-confidence			√	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Appendix 1 - Learning through Work Capability and Values statement**

The Certificate encourages you to maximise the learning, personal and professional development you gain from your work experience. Underlying the scheme is the idea that you are developing your capability for being a professional. Professor Michael Eraut, who has studied how professionals learn through work defines capability as what you bring to a situation that enables you to think, interact and perform effectively. For this reason we are interested in how you develop your capability for dealing with situations and creating new situations in the particular work role you are undertaking. The capability statement identifies the areas of development that we would like you to be aware of while you are engaged in your work. In addition you will add any other capability that you believe is necessary for your work role.

The Certificate encourages you to develop and demonstrate your capability for managing and evaluating your own development for your role in the workplace.

1 Managing your own development: the attitudes, skills and behaviours that motivate and enable you to take responsibility for, plan and engage in experiences that enable you to develop yourself. In successfully completing the Certificate you will have demonstrated that you have:

- taken responsibility for, thought about, planned for and engaged in your own personal and professional development, taking advantage of the opportunities available to you
- reflected on and evaluated the learning, personal and professional development you have gained through your work experiences
- documented your experiences and what you have learnt from them, and gathered and organized evidence of your learning and development in your reflective diary or bog.

The Certificate emphasises the importance of developing capability to deal with situations (particularly new and challenging situations).

2 Being able to deal with situations: solve problems work with challenge and take advantage of opportunity: your reflections will show how you have worked with challenge and uncertainty, engaged with problems in a range of work situations. These stories will reveal how you have understood and analysed a situation, decided what to do, found things out in order to decide what needs to be done, done things and learnt through the experience. In short, how you have made things happen. Your stories will not necessarily reflect success, in some cases stories may reveal how you have had to overcome significant setbacks and demonstrate your resilience in the face of failure.

The Certificate encourages you to think about these important generic dimensions of capability to deal with situations and make things happen.

- 3 Being able to develop the knowledge you need to deal with the situation: to be able to find out what you need to know in order to do what you need to do.
- 4 Being creative and enterprising: you need to be creative, enterprising and resourceful to invent new solutions, adapt to changing circumstances in novel ways and create new opportunities for yourself.
- 5 Being an effective communicator : to make things happen you need to be an effective communicator, to be able to communicate in ways that are appropriate to the situation, to be able to communicate to different audiences using different media.
- 6 Being able to work with and lead others: your reflections will reveal how you have worked and developed relationships with other people and taken the initiative in helping others make good decisions and actions.
- 7 Behaving ethically and with social responsibility: your reflections will provide a vehicle for showing how you have dealt with ethical issues – how you have decided what is right or wrong, considered the values of others which are relevant in your activities, and tried to do the right thing.
- 8 And any other capabilities that you feel you need to be effective in your work role.

**Through your engagement with the Certificate you will also have the opportunity to demonstrate qualities and dispositions that are important to being an effective professional including:**

- **Your will to be an effective professional and to behave professionally:** what are the hallmarks of being an effective professional?
- **Your values:** your reflections will reveal the values you invest in the enterprises you contribute to and the value you add to the enterprise.
- **Your confidence:** your reflections will reveal how your confidence has developed as a result of encountering and dealing effectively with situations, accomplishing new things and coping with significant challenges

## **Appendix 2 Reflective Work Experience Diary**

### **Week Commencing 28<sup>th</sup> June**

This was the first week back at XXXXXXXXXXXX since Easter for me, and in that space of time there had been a number of new additions to the workforce both behind the counter and out in the yard. First impression of my new colleague behind the counter were that he was a very enthusiastic worker and particularly talkative. I was introduced to him by my manager, and after a short while we began to talk and get acquainted.

It transpired that he had only been working with XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX for a week prior to my return, but he had worked in the XXXXX branch for a number of years and so had more experience than me at the systems (having only worked at XXXXXXXXXXXX part time for the past 4 years). This meant that he was able to show me a number of new things on the XXXXXXXXXXXX server which I hadn't known how to do before, such as how to look up the original purchase orders for a delivery, and how to look up what orders were to be expected over the coming days.

It had been a while since I had last been introduced to a new colleague, so this was quite a valuable experience as it meant that I had been able to feel anew the awkwardness that sometimes ensues when meeting a new person. After the first day, it was clear that we would get along like a house on fire, especially since he was the closest colleague to my age, which meant he was able to relate to a lot more topics that I was interested in outside of the workplace. This experience also showed me how important it is to welcome a new member of staff into the team so that they do not feel left out, which struck me as ironic because we both appeared to be new staff to the other; I was returning from University, after having spent the past 3 months there. My colleague had been working at XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX for a week and was therefore new to me, so the both of us were trying to welcome the other to a new workplace, causing some entertaining politeness in a number of instances, such as offering to make the next round of coffee.

### **Week Commencing 5<sup>th</sup> July**

A number of opportunities arose this week that allowed me to further explore the XXXXXXXXXXXX systems, with the help of my new colleague. One such situation was when we were putting some stock away and we noticed that we had received more door handles that couldn't fit onto the shelf. My colleague showed me how to raise an enquiry on the system to see the most recent stock movements for that item, including all sales and receipts for that item. This meant that I could quickly see how often we appeared to sell that product, as well as seeing when we last received a delivery of such products.

This struck me as being a useful thing to know how to do, for any company, for it means that as a stock manager you can identify those products that aren't selling as frequently and can allow you to amend the quantity of stock that is ordered to ensure that you aren't ordering stock that may turn into dead stock or pass its expiration date too soon.

In addition to the stock movement enquiry, I also learnt how to enquire about the products details, such as how to bring up a picture of the product (which was particularly useful for bricks and door handles), who the supplier of that product was and what prices we could sell such products at.

## **Week Commencing 12<sup>th</sup> July**

The Guildford branch of XXXXXXXXXXXX suffered a fire this week, which caused disruptions for all elements of XXXXXXXXXXXX - some more than others. My XXXXXXXXXXXX branch was particularly affected because, as a result of the fire, all of the phone calls that were originally targeted for Guildford were being redirected to XXXXXXXXXXXX. In addition to this, a number of the Guildford shop staff were relocated to our shop temporarily until some porta-cabins were erected in the Guildford site, and the electricity supply was re-established.

As a result of the redirected calls, we had to amend our greetings when we answered the phones to emphasise that it was the XXXXXXXXXXXX branch, and had to ask whether the caller wished to speak to XXXXXXXXXXXX or Guildford. Frequently, there was confusion as the caller double checked the number they had dialled, with a few simply hanging up and redialling before realising that they had indeed dialled the correct number. If the caller did request Guildford, we had to frequently take messages for them in the same manner as normal, and the Guildford staff would contact the customers as soon as possible. The additional calls had a negative impact on our phone sales, because often all five lines were in use by both XXXXXXXXXXXX and Guildford calls, meaning that some customers were unable to get through to XXXXXXXXXXXX for a brief period of time.

There was also a minor amount of confusion when customers failed to acknowledge that they were speaking to a member of the XXXXXXXXXXXX staff when placing a delivery, which consequently meant that a number of deliveries were processed to locations that would normally not be covered by our branch. One particular company that repeatedly placed deliveries with the XXXXXXXXXXXX staff was one working directly at the University of Surrey, and after the first two deliveries were processed we were warned to keep an eye out for delivery locations that would need to be redirected to Guildford.

In addition to the busy phone lines, it was incredibly busy behind the counter due to the fact that we now had four additional members of staff who needed to use a computer, when we only had one spare desk. This was resolved by one of our members of staff giving up their desk to work solely on the counter and another member of staff taking over as a driver for the deliveries, removing their need for a desk.

This incident has been a particularly interesting experience for me because it emphasised how having too many employees working in a branch could sometimes reduce average productivity amongst employees, as more were left without anything to do. It also showed me how a disruption to one branches general sale could have both a positive and an adverse effect on the operations within our branch. Due to the main shop in Guildford having burnt down, XXXXXXXXXXXX was visited by a higher number of customers who decided that we were closer than some other branches, meaning that we experienced a marginally higher level of sales for the period that the Guildford staff operated from our branch.

## **Week Commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> August**

This past week has featured a number of interesting situations for me that have challenged my ability to take advantage of opportunities, communication skills and my general stock control abilities. One customer I served suffered from hearing difficulties. As a result of this his speech was impaired, which made it difficult for me to understand what he was looking to buy. I solved this problem by bringing up the relevant items on the screen and ensuring that they were correct with the customer before proceeding with the transaction.

In addition to this, a number of times I answered the phones to a customer who were on their mobiles or were otherwise on a dodgy line, and so made it incredibly hard to make out what it was that they wanted to order. Sadly, there was no way around such calls except to listen extremely hard so as to catch exactly what they said and, where I missed it, ask them to repeat themselves or confirm with them what it was that they were asking for.

During the course of marking off my deliveries, I had to double check on the system a number of products that were empty on the shelves but that I had expected on the delivery. In some cases, I noticed that the quantity on screen didn't correlate to that on the shelves, and so I proceeded to correct the quantity and then added additional lines to the orders from the relevant suppliers to ensure that we received more stock in time. I continued in this manner with a number of other items where the system in fact showed negative stock. Often, I discovered such items had been missed off when they were delivered and so the stock levels weren't updated upon receipt.

I made one significant mistake this week as well, which caused me a great deal of humility and added no small amount of work to my colleagues who had to rescue the sale I blundered. We serve two companies who both feature very similar names, xxxxx and xxxxx. Over the phone, both names can sound almost identical, depending on who is speaking, and on Wednesday afternoon I took a phone delivery from a customer who, at the time, I thought was from xxxxx (it turned out to be the other xxxxx).

The order itself was large, consisting of around 9 tonnes of goods. Such an order would fit onto our largest vehicle ok, leaving a small amount of room for a smaller order to be fitted on to, but if the largest vehicle was unavailable then it would take two deliveries which would consequently take much longer to deliver. I didn't understand these details at the time of the order, so I agreed with the customer that we could arrange a first drop for the goods in two days time, and agreed to have the delivery go to "the site where all your other deliveries have been going".

I processed the order but when the delivery manager ran through the orders for Friday morning he alerted me to the fact that the delivery would be nigh impossible to first thing because we had our largest vehicle out of order due to an MOT test and a relatively busy schedule. He said that we should be able to get the goods out for late Friday morning at the earliest, so I proceeded to phone the customer up, upon which time I realised that I had charged the goods to the wrong account. I worked out where I had gone wrong and proceeded to call the correct company, who were naturally angry that I had messed up, and I was later summoned to speak to the manager about what had happened. The talk helped me to realise that when taking such orders it was sometimes better to take the time to double check certain details such as the delivery address and the account number to ensure that, in cases where a number of accounts sound the same, the correct accounts are charged and the correct delivery address is noted down.

### **Week Commencing 9<sup>th</sup> August**

This week has provided me with a number of opportunities to further my communication and leadership skills through interaction with the customers and suppliers, as well as through being provided with a project that required me to use my own initiative.

I served a customer who wished to purchase a number of staircase parts which we sadly didn't stock. Because of the nature of the product, I had to contact the supplier directly to confirm a number of important facts before the sale could go ahead, so I took the relevant details from my customer and promised to return her call before proceeding to contact the supplier.

The suppliers were incredibly helpful, and I learnt a lot about the appropriate way to handle an enquiry from a customer over the phone. Once I had collected all the information that was required, I returned my customers call and proceeded to take payment and raise the order with the suppliers.

My manager requested that I reorganise the warehouse, where we stored a number of our larger products, when the shop was quiet. He gave me a couple of pointers, such as that I had to leave enough room in the middle of the warehouse for the forklifts to be parked at night, but for the most I was provided with artistic license to do whatever I wanted with the warehouse.

With the help of one of my colleagues, we were able to complete the task in a few hours. The project provided me with a taste of leadership, for I was able to direct where I wanted to move the stock around. However, I was also provided with a taste of what it's like to be a democratic leader, for often my colleague had interesting feedback on my suggestions and so our combined efforts made the warehouse far easier to traverse than it had been previously.

Unfortunately, I very nearly missed out on a high value sale this week due to my negligence with clarifying certain details. A customer came in asking for a list of prices on a number of key building materials, such as timber, ballast and shingle. He didn't have an account or a trade cash card, which meant that I was limited on the prices that I could offer, given my inability to see what profits we could make on each products. I gave the gentleman the prices I would normally provide to cash customers, which were unfortunately around 40p more expensive per metre on the wood compared to our competitors, I discovered, as well as several pounds dearer on our tonne bags of ballast. Luckily, one of my colleagues overheard the discussion and came over to rescue the sale.

It transpired that the customer was part of a building company who had recently begun development on a site near to our store, and so was looking to purchase a large quantity of goods, provided that we were able to offer good value and were able to make speedy deliveries.

This encounter has been of great benefit to my understanding of what it takes to be a professional, as I listened to what my colleague said and what he did to recover the sale, such as asking what company he worked for, asking whether he would be interested in setting up a cash card linked to a cash advance that could have specific rates established and so on. The encounter also highlighted to me how important it is to ensure that sales staff, such as myself, remain professional at all times and strive to provide the best service to their customers, for in some rare cases it could result in a large sale.

### **Week Commencing 16<sup>th</sup> August**

An interesting request was made of me this week by a customer on the phone. The customer wished to know what our closest branch was to Guildford, so that he could have a browse in a store that wasn't "burnt to the ground". Previously I had only been able to search for the closest branch to myself, so I consulted one of my colleagues who were more than happy to show me how to tackle that request.

That encounter was, I feel, quite important to my learning because it highlighted the importance of seeking help when I am unable to satisfy an enquiry, and also showed that it is acceptable for an employee to hold his hands up and admit that he doesn't know but to endeavour to find the answer to a query – an essential lesson for customer and, in some cases, supplier relations.

I was also provided with a large opportunity to make a high valued sale on Friday when a young lady came into the shop asking for assistance regarding landscaping. She had a diagram of her front and

back garden, and explained that she wanted to pave the front and back gardens with a similar stone. After clarifying some details, such as the size of the garden and her preference for colour, I proceeded to show her some samples of some of the slabs that we kept in stock. My efforts procured the Indian Sandstone range, to which she took a liking to and we then proceeded to look at the various patterns that they could be ordered in. Finally, my customer settled on a number of project packs that would allow her to have a few concentric circles in the back garden and smaller slabs for the front. The sale amounted to around £2000, and my customer thanked me for my extremely helpful attitude, something that few customers did and indeed made me feel much happier about my efforts in securing the sale.

### **Week Commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> August**

Partially as a result of the fire at XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX, this week featured a review of the appropriate fire safety measures and emergency routines. This refresher included a demonstration of the fire escape routines, including a full scale evacuation of the yard and shop. The highlight of the evacuation was where one customer in the yard couldn't hear the fire alarm, and so it took a number of minutes to get him to leave the warehouse, which in the case of a real fire could have been a severe risk to his, or indeed any customers, wellbeing.

Following on from this fire drill, a notice was issued in our branch highlighting what we needed to remember in the case of a real fire and how best to explain to customers that they needed to evacuate quickly. This notice could have been applicable to any company, so I considered it to be of particular importance and definitely worth remembering.

Spurred on from the fire safety training, I requested a brief instruction on how to use the pallet truck in the shop, something that I knew would be of use to a number of workplaces, given the heavy loads that could be needed to be moved. In addition to the instruction on how to use the pallet truck, I was also shown how to operate the warehouse shutter and given a refresher on the appropriate way to lift heavy objects, lessons which could again be applicable to a number of companies.

### **Week Commencing 30<sup>th</sup> August**

Being the end of summer, business was slow this week and thus I had to find other means of keeping myself busy and essentially motivated. We were still receiving stock deliveries every day, albeit in smaller quantities than throughout summer, and preparation had begun for the stock take that would take place at the end of September.

One way that I managed to keep myself busy was by ensuring that the overstock aisles had been emptied of as much stock as could fit onto the shelves, and that the existing stock on the shelves were in the correct locations and were stacked neatly and safely.

In addition to ensuring that the stock was all out on the shelves, I also began to undergo on the spot stock checks of certain products as I put them away, ensuring that the levels of stock on the system matched that of the shelves. Following such stock checks, I amended the existing levels on the system to maintain accuracy.

This week has signified the necessity of staying motivated whilst very little is happening, for I noticed on a number of occasions, particularly towards the end of the week it was extremely difficult to muster the will to again look around the shop to find stock that could go out. Despite this, through requesting additional work and aiming to answer as many phones as possible I was able to remain busy and fill

my working hours with productive work, and hopefully this reflected in the exceptionally tidy shop floor around which I worked.

### **Week Commencing 6<sup>th</sup> September**

Upon my return from holiday I discovered that there had been a number of changes made around the shop, mainly affecting the stock levels within the shop. In the middle of the week I had a lengthy discussion with one of my colleagues regarding the stock control methods of the company as a whole, which resulted in a number of interesting points.

The first point that we spoke about was the mandated range of products that every branch of XXXXXXXXXXXX must stock, to enable a core selection of products to be available everywhere. One delivery we received following a change in the mandated levels of stock meant that we had received excessive numbers of certain products that I knew would not shift for a number of weeks to come. Myself and my colleague felt that although it was a highly effective idea to have a mandated range of products, the quantities that we had been allocated were comical as it would be impossible to sell that many units so quickly. We agreed that the quantity of mandated ranges should take into account the sales made over a period of time, so that a product that sold one unit a month would not receive ten units in a single delivery. This power currently rests at Head Office, but we felt that the local managers should be permitted to have an input as to what their mandated level should be before receiving more mandated stock. Ultimately, Head Office would have the final say but this way shops would not receive excessive amounts of slow selling stock.

The second topic in our discussion was focused on the way in which stock was shifted from overstock to the shop floor. As it stood at the time, I was required to note down every item in the overstock aisles, then go around the shop noting down how many units could be moved before finally taking them out to the shop floor. Such a process took me upwards of two hours to complete, during which time I would be difficult to get hold of and so wouldn't be of any use on the counter and so on. I thought that it would be better to have a system that linked sales to product locations, so that when a product was sold within the shop it would flash up on a separate screen that I could glance at and then shift more stock to fill the spaces.

I conveyed this final point to my superior, and action was now taken. A series of additional product locations were added, whereby all overstock items were listed, and which could be added to whenever more stock was added to the overstock aisles. These locations could have an entire list printed off, which would have made the entire process of refilling the shelves far quicker as I would merely need to tick off what items could fit out and amend the product locations where necessary to reflect the new stock levels.