

Job experience narrative



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ When can you come in for an interview? ” What a relief! I’d been out of work for six weeks without unemployment benefits, so I was happy to hear these words on my voice mail. I applied to Kinko’s because I am fairly computer literate and able to run copy machines, and two old friends worked for the company years before and told me enough about it that I figured I knew what to expect.

They and I were both right – the money wasn’t bad, but the headaches were more frequent than I’d have liked. They hired me for the position I wanted – courier, which included working in the self-serve area when there were no deliveries or pickups. As I expected, it reminded me strongly of my earlier experiences of working retail, in which every day dealing with customers felt like a battle. Though I handle tasks well and never had problems balancing out my cash register, I was a bit too prickly to excel at service, especially when it was busy. Unlike some of my co-workers, I was not particularly deferential, unlike the “ lifers,” who’d been the company for years and enjoyed the pace and routine.

I rarely tolerate people being rude or snobbish to me, especially because I avoided provoking them until they struck first. I tended to give as well as I got, and in my former hometown, where rudeness seemed to be the rule, I got away with some openly rude behavior (like finding ways to mock snobs’ ignorance of how things worked and making not-so-innocent retorts to customers’ remarks) and figured I was simply defending myself. At the same time, I received praise from several customers who found me helpful; one was the assigned “ mystery shopper,” a pre-chosen member of the public

who was paid to visit the store and evaluate our service. They must have been nice to me first, because they gave me a perfect mark.

The rest of my duties involved pickup and delivery, which was by far the best part of the job. I generally drive safely and could easily handle the often-heavy loads I had to haul, so I enjoyed that aspect of the job. My deliveries sometimes took me as far as fifty miles from the store, meaning that I could stay away from the customers (and my bosses) for large parts of a single day, sometimes two hours at a time. Being alone also gave me a sense of peace I could never find in a noisy, busy store.

My biggest problems were with management itself, and not because I did the job poorly. In my experience, I found that the best managers respect their workers, do not lose their composure, and leave their personal troubles at home – and I did not have the best managers. Theresa, the store manager, handled things like the budget well and was good with customers, but she violated my three rules for good management. She was bitter, isolated, and unhappy, far from her family and without friends or a love life.

She was also clinically depressed, a fact she did not hide. Without medication, she was moody and tense, quick to snap for something petty or lock herself in her office, close the blinds, and cry loudly. When she took her pills, she was catty in an annoyingly giddy way. In any case, she had no genuine regard for her employees and enjoyed berating her workers; as a co-worker told me, “ It makes her day. ” Jamie, the assistant manager, was easily intimidated to begin with and was terrified of Theresa, though he tried

to compensate with attempts to take himself seriously and instill respect in others (which failed).

He was jittery and mousy, with a monotone voice and acrid breath. He immediately struck me as a slightly creepier version of Mister Rogers, and he took himself far more seriously than his ineffectiveness warranted. He thought that oversimplifying everything and talking down to his workers made him a good manager (and he gave himself ample credit). He had no idea how to deal with people, and he and Theresa relied on negative reinforcement (he said “ We’re working on that,” but I think they were trying to find more ways to be negative, not to solve it). When I pointed this out to him, that immediately put me on his and Theresa’s bad side, but I cared little for favoritism. I found both of them typical of corporate retail management – arrogant, condescending, and petty.

My dealings with co-workers were generally civil, and we shared a common dislike for Theresa and Jamie. Being in school, I found the other students easiest to speak to, since they were generally smarter and more exposed to things, like alternative music and offbeat films. Pablo, who had seniority over me, was generally agreeable and could converse freely about Michael Moore movies and web design. Emily, a shy girl who dressed in punk clothes, shared my taste in music and had a similar disdain for authority, though she tended to hold her tongue much better than I did. Mark, the document creation specialist, was several years older than I, married with a “ special needs” son (which perhaps accounted for his patient demeanor) and always friendly and calm. I certainly clicked better with them than I did with the “ locals,” a faction of senior employees who had generally started working

there after high school, married shortly after that, and tended to spent their free time either managing their children or drinking with one another.

As a teetotaler, I never joined them, marking me as an outsider. After ten months, I found work out of state and made arrangements to move. I doubt I ever really had “ short-timer syndrome,” the company term for being negligent in one’s last few weeks. Still, I was happy to be leaving and gave no illusions otherwise.

On my last day, my managers avoided me, as happy to see me go as I was to leave. The job gave me some skills, but I tired of the aggravation and annoyances. The high-speed, high-stress environment did not suit me in the least, and I was glad to leave it behind.