

they're going to pay. So after 5 minutes on the phone with this scheduler explaining the minute details of the shop, she finally asks me if I'd like to do it...I told her that all I really needed to know is where it was located, and how much it paid. She told me, and I tried to turn her down gently, but apparently she was having a really hard time filling the shop. So I agreed. Damn. I'm too nice.

Of course, then she sent over the form, which is 5 pages complete with narratives, and she told me I had to go over the form with her before I did the shop to make sure I understood it.

I know that schedulers have to deal with flaky shoppers not following directions, but I'm getting tired of having to spend my time and my cell phone minutes on the line going over every single line of the shop:

“Ok, now on question one, it asks for the employee's name...that means you need to put the employee's name in that slot. The next question asks for the date and time you were in the store, so you need to put the exact date and time you were in the store. Don't confuse that with the “day” because that would be the day of the week...understand?”

But, I guess this is what a new shopper needs to go through to prove themselves.

Lately, I've been signing up with a lot of companies that require training...I have to go through pages and pages of information, and then do quizzes at the end. I'm proud to say, actually, that I've been getting 100% on these quizzes. But it's still a pain.

Even a company that I did a lot of work for “back in the day” has revamped its application procedure...I have to do a sample shop, as well as submit documentation that I'm an independent contractor. What's up with that?

I guess I'm just tired at this point...So far, for September, I only have \$147 worth of shops scheduled. I'd like to get up around \$1000. Heck, I NEED to get up around \$1000, especially if I don't get this web gig.

9 September, Saturday

Exactly one month ago today, I started signing up for assignments. Since that time, I have secured \$1381.61 worth of assignments. I have been paid for \$213 of those assignments (checks already received and cashed.) I get, on average, 5-10 offers a day...this includes email contact as well as phone. Actually, that's not too bad. It's not my all-time record of \$1800-ish, but I'm still not signed up with all the companies that I was working for before. Not only that, I'm still having problems with one company receiving my W-9. I faxed it, I emailed it, and I'm a little concerned that it's been lost. I'm really kind of annoyed too, because this company has a TON of apartment shops in my area, and I really want to take them. They still use handwritten forms, which is a pain, but they pay pretty well, so I'm willing to overlook it for awhile. If, that is, I ever get to work for them.

I didn't get the web-gig, which I'm ok with. At first I was a little bummed, but let's face it, I'm not a 9-5 type of chick. And, after spending all day in front of the computer, I know I would be less than thrilled to work on my own projects at home.

This little experiment has definitely opened my eyes to what a new shopper goes through. It's nice to know that by following my own advice, people really can make money at mystery shopping. It does take some time, at the beginning especially, but after only a month, I have over \$1300 worth of shops!

What's even more interesting, is that I have forgotten how important it is to be organized. I have calendars and file folders, and dry-erase boards, plus my own little excel file to keep track of things. It would be nice to be able to combine all of this into some sort of system...a one-stop program, so to speak, so that I know when companies need to be invoiced, when follow-up is needed, and making sure that I've been paid. I think I need to talk to a developer friend of mine and see what he thinks about creating something like that.

But for now, I have some shops to finish!

BLANK RETAIL EVALUATION

STORE NAME:	DATE:
STORE ADDRESS:	TIME LEFT:
TIME ENTERED:	ASSOCIATE'S NAME AND DESCRIPTION:
SHOPPER'S DESCRIPTION:	

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Was the exterior of the store clean? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the parking lot well lit? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the store adequately lit? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the overall condition of the store good? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the music at an appropriate level? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the merchandise well stocked? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did the merchandise have price tags? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Were signs legible? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Was the floor clean? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |

COMMENTS:

GREETING

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Was your greeting/acknowledgment prompt? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Time it took to be greeted: | | |
| Were you greeted in a friendly manner? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exact Greeting: | | |
| Were there enough salespeople for the amount of traffic in the store? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |

COMMENTS:

PRODUCT PRESENTATION

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ITEM REQUESTED: | | |
| Did the associate determine your needs? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did they suggest an item that suited those needs? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item suggested: | | |
| Were they familiar with the location of the merchandise? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did the associate inform you of the benefits of the merchandise? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did the associate answer all of your questions to your satisfaction? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If the associate couldn't answer your questions, did they refer you to someone who could? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Name and description of associate: | | |
| Did the associate overcome your objection? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Objection used, and the associate's response: | | |

BLANK RETAIL EVALUATION continued

Did the associate offer other merchandise complimentary to their initial suggestion? YES NO
Item suggested:

COMMENTS:

COMMON COURTESIES

Was the associate:

Courteous?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Respectful?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Efficient?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledgeable?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

Did you feel that the associate wanted to help you? YES NO

Based on your experience, would you return? YES NO

COMMENTS:

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE FROM BEGINNING TO END:

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

While you're out on the town shopping up a storm, you are going to encounter many bizarre situations that you wouldn't even think of! The weirdest stuff is going to happen... guaranteed.

Now, the basic scenarios deal with common sense:

- * Obviously if you can't complete a shop, you need to tell your scheduler immediately.
- * If you get caught, you need to remain as anonymous as possible on the assignment, and then tell your scheduler what happened.
- * If an employee is rude or unsavory, you need to keep your cool, after all you're at work as well and you need to retain a bit of professionalism.
- * The most common scenario in apartments is when your leasing agent passes you off to someone else. When that happens, most companies want you to try to complete the shop with the other agent, writing up the report as it happened.

Below are some anecdotes about situations that actually happened to me. This is just to inform you about different things that can come up during the course of an assignment, and remind you to always be alert! You're going to encounter things that would have never crossed your mind, plenty of weird situations that will leave you shaking your head saying, "How am I going to write THIS up?"

What if the Employee is Acting Unprofessionally?

I walked into a retail store and saw two employees. The one I dealt with was a gentleman, who was nearly perfect in his presentation. He was kind, friendly, and professional; he tried to up-sell and suggestive-sell. He was just fine, and did his job well. He wasn't the issue.

The woman, was on the phone, screaming profanity, saying things like, "Just bring me my money, you M*&^% F*&^%&*, S*&^&* O' B*%&!!!" It made for a very uncomfortable situation, and I could even tell that the male employee did not know how to respond.

When I got to writing the report, all of the questions dealt with the associate I talked to. There wasn't anything that would let me comment on the situation. Remember, companies generally just want what they have listed on the form. If there isn't a space to comment about music, they probably don't need you to comment. I was saved by the very last question, which said, "Would you come back?" I said, "No! And let me tell you why!" Of course, you need to be diplomatic and use phrases such as, "The associate was not using appropriate language for being in the presence of a customer." And you'll be able to get your point across without embarrassing the employee too much.

What if You Get Hit-On by an Employee?

In this apartment shop, my cover story was that I was single, looking for a one-bedroom apartment. The leasing agent was a young man who had just moved to the area and had only been working at the building for a few weeks. I doubt that he had much experience within rentals, as we spent a lot of time talking about me. He did a fair job of showing me the community, and the apartment, but never tried to close me. Instead, he asked if I had a boyfriend and would I like to join him for dinner. I thanked him, but turned him down. He gave me his phone number, and told me that he hoped to hear from me. Writing up this report was a bit hard, because I couldn't help but think of the young man's feelings when his boss would eventually approach him. I wrote that he seemed more interested in my personal interests than my needs for the apartment, and although he was very friendly and outgoing, did not close the deal.

I guess that's true in either case... I didn't go out with him, nor did I get the apartment!

What if You Can't Complete a Shop?

Now this particular situation didn't happen to me, but I know the owner of the shopping company that this happened to. I had to include this story as a blatant, "DON'T DO THIS" warning.

There was a woman who accepted a bowling alley shop, but couldn't complete it, so she *gave it to her husband*, without the consent of the shopping company. (DON'T DO THIS)

Her dear ol' Hubby took his pal with him to complete the assignment and *they brought the form in with them to the alley*. (DON'T DO THIS)

So the hubby and friend are sitting around, drinking beers, eating nachos, bowling frames, and having a grand old time, when the waitress comes up to them. She sees the hubby writing on the form and asks what they were doing. The hubby replies, "Oh, We're mystery shoppers! Do you want to see how you did?" and actually showed the waitress her report... right there... on the spot.

It boggles the mind... DON'T DO THIS!

Needless to say, that woman isn't shopping anywhere anytime soon. She risked the professionalism of the company, and has pretty much made herself an outcast. All because she passed off a shop thinking her husband was competent enough to complete it on his own.

What if the Building Catches Fire?

Yes, it's true. Anything can happen on a shop. This situation occurred when I was apartment shopping, in a great garden-style community. A garden style is the type of apartments that only go up a few levels, and there are tons of buildings spread throughout the grounds.

The agent started me out looking at an apartment, and was going to tour me around the amenities later. When we came out of the apartment, we saw that the building across the street from us was on fire! We heard fire engines in the background, and a fairly sizable crowd had gathered to see what was going on. The agent was very professional, and excused herself to see if there was anything that she could do.

The community immediately went on "lock-down" and I was held there for about 30 minutes while everything got under control. Thankfully, the family in the apartment was not injured. Apparently someone had left a curling iron on the stove. Upon returning to the leasing office, the agent, as well as myself, completely forgot to tour the community amenities. And besides, they were still on lock-down, so the gym, pool, and business center were all closed up. There was nothing for me left to do. I stated all of this in my report, because being a mystery shopper means that you report events as they occurred. The leasing agent did an excellent job with follow-up, apologizing for the eventful day, and offering another tour if I wanted it. My scheduler told me that I didn't need to go out again, and that I could just write up the report as I had it.

What if the Employee Wants to Save your Soul?

This was a financial shop where I had to meet with an agent about a new savings account. I sat down with the agent, who was very friendly and up-beat, but when I gave her my name, she went into a diatribe about the religious significance and origin.

She went on about what a good "Christian" I must be, just because of my name. I was extremely surprised at her reaction, as it caught me completely off guard. Regardless of my affiliations, this isn't appropriate behavior for any financial institution. I politely told her that I wasn't Christian and her eyes got to be the size of dinner plates. The first thing that went through my head was, "Uh-oh, *now* you've done it!"

At that time, she opened up a whole new can of worms, telling me about her journey to “the Lord,” and how she had been saved. She began quoting scripture, and recommended that I go to her church bible-study so that I could learn the “significance of being.” Apparently, she told me, my parents were on the right track because they gave me a good name, but it was up to me to realize my vision with “the Lord.” All I wanted was to open a new savings account, and she wanted to save me from the depths of hell.

I successfully managed to re-direct her energy to the task at hand. But then but she kept referencing opening a bank account to opening “Your heart to the Lord.” She told me that if I prayed a little every day, it was like making “spiritual deposits.” Fifteen minutes later, I was able to thank the woman and leave, walking out of there in complete awe. Of course, I wrote this up as diplomatically as possible, stating that the woman started a religious-based conversation that left me feeling uncomfortable, and she seemed more interested in discussing my spiritual views than opening an account.

What if the Employee gives too much Information?

This report was probably the hardest report I had to write up. An apartment community hired me to evaluate a potential employee who at her current place of employment. They wanted to see what kind of skills she had as an agent before they hired her.

She was fine during the phone presentation, and through most of the tour. A few bumps here and there, but nothing major. At the close, however, when she brought me back to the office, somehow she got on a tangent about how she was trying to better her life.

She told me that her husband had just ran off to Las Vegas with a 19-year-old “hussy,” and had left her all alone with no money. She continued telling me about the affair, and how she was better off without him, and she actually began to cry. The agent excused herself for a moment, and returned a bit more composed, ready to help me get an apartment. When I told her that I had just begun my search, and would not be renting that day, she looked as though she would break down again.

All I said in my report was that she disclosed personal details about her life that were not appropriate for potential renters to hear. As much as I would have loved to refrain from putting anything in the report about it, she was being shopped to see how she dealt with prospects. I really did believe that she was trying to better herself, and perhaps this new job would have given her a better income, but I couldn’t let my personal views get in the way of the report. Regardless of her situation, she should have kept her personal problems out of the work environment, and certainly not disclose them to potential renters.

As you can see, a lot of situations can arise that you may not have even considered! Most assignments will go off without a hitch, but make sure that you maintain your cover-story, act with professionalism, and you’ll gather your own anecdotes to share around the Mystery Shopping bon-fire!

THE JOY OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Chances are that you bought this book because you're looking for some sort of fun way to make extra money. Perhaps you're looking at changing careers, spending more time with your family, or just saving up for a special occasion. Whatever it is you seek, I hope you find it with great abundance.

More and more people are turning towards self-employment as a means to not only supplement their income, but to hopefully someday replace it. Companies no longer have life-long employees who work for 40 years, and then get to retire on a nice, thick pension. Heck, we're lucky if business stick around for a decade, much less employ us and our future generations.

With the Internet, self-employment has become a reality for many people, and I wanted you to know that Mystery Shopping isn't the only option out there. I really am, "Queen of the Random Job" because I've tried everything I know to make ends meet just so I can continue with my puppetry passions. Often I hear from my students and shoppers requesting more information on other work at home jobs and business opportunities. I gladly share all of my trials and tribulations because I love helping people, especially when it comes to creating a life of freedom from the 9-5 regime.

There are a ton out resources out there, and sometimes it can be hard to maneuver, figuring out which are "for real" and which are just bunk. I don't claim to know everything, but I do know a fair share of what to avoid, and what is legitimate. To help others get started on the path of self-employment, I have created a new website: www.QueenoftheRandomJob.com. It's a completely free resource that has amusing articles about my life in the Land of Self-Employment, resources to help you along, and most importantly, a FREE newsletter that highlights legitimate work from home opportunities from various companies.

If you're looking to expand your knowledge base on becoming self-employed, I encourage you to join us!

Thanks again for reading this book. I hope it has been helpful, informative, and fun for you.

Good Luck on your new adventure, and Happy Shopping!

-Bethany Mooradian

"Queen Buzzy"

www.QueenoftheRandomJob.com