

Case Study: Buyer - Stephen

What do you do?

I manage a team of buyers. After meeting with user groups in our company and determining their needs and requirements, we research relevant suppliers.

Then we contact suppliers and get proposals from them, which involves asking for their pricing and product information. After that, we analyse their proposals. If they meet our requirements, we negotiate agreements with them.



What is your background?

After school, I went to university and graduated with a business degree. I then spent a number of years in a communications company, starting in an entry-level position and working my way up.

When I started my current job, there were only two people in the department. I did pretty much everything. Eventually we grew to over 20 staff, and I had considerably more responsibility. Now I manage the department.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You definitely need good people skills for this job, as you spend a lot of time negotiating with suppliers and people within your company. You also need to be assertive.

An analytical mind is also important for purchasing. And you need to be organised.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

I think the skills you gain as a buyer could be applied to a career as a financial analyst, marketing manager, or a materials and logistics manager.

What changes will there be in the future?

We're all moving towards a more mobile workforce. Contract work is becoming more common, and although it may not offer as much security as traditional salaried work, it's often good to change jobs every few years to develop your skills and enrich your career.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

I think dealing with the political aspects of an organisation is one of the biggest challenges facing a buyer. It involves bringing people together from different levels and departments to reach an agreement.

Sometimes people see you as a "roadblock," preventing them from getting their work done.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

The best way to enter purchasing is to take a junior position and learn the mechanics of a purchasing department. Then you can start working your way up.

What do you like about your job?

What I really like most about my job is the number of tasks and projects that I can face on a day-to-day basis.

It might be agreeing some software licensing, or making a major purchase, or dealing with a service or an unusual commodity like travel, for instance, for the whole organisation.

I really feel like I contribute to the company, making improvements in savings, improving efficiency and just helping the organisation to do things better. That really satisfies me.

There are a lot of different skills that are required to do this job and that's very enjoyable. I enjoy using all kinds of skills that I've learned through my years in purchasing.

What do you dislike about your job?

One of the dislikes I have about being a buyer is the internal politics that are often involved in my job. It's difficult to get through that sometimes - to get the job done.

We also have to deal with a lot of paperwork to make sure we're getting the best deal and getting the best prices. And that's part of the job that I don't really like.

Also, being seen as an obstacle by some of the other groups is an aspect that I just don't like.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

My advice to people wanting to enter the purchasing profession would be to first talk to buyers and get a sense of what they do.

I would also say that you should invest in yourself and get a good education. Once you start working full-time, it becomes more difficult to educate yourself and to get the skills that you need.

A day in the life

8:00 am - 9:00 am

Reviewing correspondence; planning the day; sending emails.

9:00 am - 10:00 am

Attending meetings; reviewing proposals; drafting some documents.

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Returning phone calls; getting clarification on bids; talking to staff about projects; requesting quotes from suppliers.

12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

Lunch.

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Meeting with internal groups about projects.

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Reviewing documentation and contracts; rewriting or continuing with a negotiation.

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Working on reports on the computer.

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Meeting with a manager to discuss current and future projects.