

Case Study: Builders' Yard Assistant - Paul

What do you do?

I am a yard assistant at a branch of a builders' merchant. I work outside for the majority of the eight-hour shift. I drive the fork lifts, serve customers, cut timber, keep the yard tidy and clean, load the lorries and offload deliveries. There's never a dull moment, there's always plenty to do.

We wear protective clothing in the yard which is provided by the company. They give us safety boots with steel toe-caps, which is standard in any builders' merchants. The uniform consists of a fleece, a big winter jacket, gloves, trousers and t-shirts. It saves on wear and tear of your own clothes and keeps everybody looking smart.



What is your background?

I've worked for a leading builders' merchant before. I started in the yard, worked my way up through sales to assistant manager and then left to work in a bank.

I decided to come back into the building trade because it's what I knew best. I saw this vacancy and have been here for five months now.

I've had health and safety training and fork lift training. A lot of it to me is common sense.

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

You have to have very good communication skills because you're dealing with customers. You get to know the regular trade customers, but we're also dealing with the general public who are not always sure of what they want. You have to take that into consideration.

You also have to have a lot of common sense in the yard. You have to put your brain into gear before you do something and make sure it's safe.

You should be fit and healthy because although we use a fork lift to move most materials, you still have to lift heavy things during the day. And you're outside in any type of weather, but you do get warm clothing provided. You get used to it, and the plus side of it is that it's quite healthy - I was going to join a gym, but I don't need to now.

You will need to learn how to use machinery such as a timber saw, because we cut wood to size for customers too. You will get training in this.

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

Any job where you are speaking to people and using communication skills.

What changes will there be in the future?

I don't think there will be. When fork lifts came in, that saved everything being lifted by hand. It made things easier for the staff and saved time.

Different computer systems might be used in the future for ordering stock and for admin, but within the yard itself, I don't think there will be any major changes.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

The most challenging in my opinion is when it's very busy, ie, summer time. In winter, it dies down, the trade dies down, you don't get as many customers in, but in summer particularly the work goes through the roof and it can get quite stressful. For you as an individual member of staff and for your colleagues as well.

Sometimes, I'll admit, I've lost my temper on a number of occasions when you're trying to do five things at once. You're trying to make sure everything's done to a high level, a good standard, and you've got to be prepared to take the difficult side of it.

When it's busy, you have to keep a level head. My advice is to keep smiling! Keep smiling, it makes it easier, and it keeps the stress down. If you've got a good team, it makes it easier. When it does get busy, we all do a bit each. There's nothing really that's that difficult about it, apart from the busy times.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

It's a small team here but there are lots of other branches and there are often vacancies advertised in the local paper.

We take people here on work experience and that's a good idea - it can be a bit daunting at first but it gives you an idea of whether you would enjoy it.

What do you like about your job?

I think it's the people that I work with and the people I meet every day. We all meet people from all walks of life in our everyday life, not just at work, and there are people we like, people we don't like.

In my opinion, I'm enjoying the job. I enjoy getting here every day, opening up the yard, meeting the customers throughout the day. It's a very simple job, working in the yard.

I like a nice tidy yard where everything's organised. It's all about first impressions. As a customer, if I were to walk into a merchant's yard and it was a complete tip, I wouldn't be impressed.

What do you dislike about your job?

When it gets particularly busy, you can get quite stressed. You've got customers left, right and centre all wanting assistance there and then and you've got other tasks to do. You have to prioritise it. You just have to do it to the best of your ability.

What are your ambitions?

I've had experience with another merchant. I started in the yard, moved into admin and sales but then chose a different career.

I'm here at Buildbase now; I've been here for five months. I'm keeping my eyes open for opportunities, give it a bit of time, get my feet under the table so to speak and then I'll be looking for something else to do within Buildbase. Whether that will be moving into sales or maybe higher, it depends what's available at the time.

Some people are quite happy to take on a position and stick with that for years to come, that's fine. But I'll be looking for something else and trying to put the experience I've had from previous jobs to my advantage.

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

Think long and hard about it - I might be wrong but, in my opinion, it wouldn't be personally the first thing I'd be thinking about for a career. But you start somewhere and it's good really to get down to the basics. If you were to go for a job within a building merchants, particularly in the yard, just think long and hard about it. Think about the skills you've got and whether you can put them to use.

We've got a very good manager here. If you've got skills and you make him aware of that, he's going to do his best to make sure that you use them to the best of your ability. Do a bit of homework, and go for it.

A day in the life

7:30 am - 8:00 am

Open the gates and deal with any early morning rush of customers.

8:00 am - 8:30 am

Load the two lorries that deliver goods to customers.

8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Serve customers.

12:30 pm - 1:00 pm

Lunch.

1:00 pm - 1:30 pm

Lorries return from deliveries. Load the second load of the day.

1:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Unload goods that have arrived from suppliers. Move and store them in the yard. Continue to help customers.

4:30 pm - 5:00 pm

Tidy and sweep the yard.