Case Study: Checkout Operator - Susan

What do you do?
I work as a cashier in a supermarket. I handle cash, greet the public and assist them in the store. On the checkout, I scan coded items and use speed keys. I also pack groceries for customers, especially ones who are shopping alone and need a hand. The emphasis in our store is on customer service and teamwork.

What is your background?
When I left school, I took a job that included being a cashier and doing merchandising and display work. I'm a real people-person and this type of job is perfectly suited to that. I was attracted to my current job by the wages and working conditions.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?
This job involves a lot of contact with customers, so you need to be friendly and polite. But you must also pay attention to detail and be sure not to make any errors. For example, prices can vary greatly depending on the type of apple a customer has selected. You have to make sure you charge them the right amount.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?
Due to their focus on customer service, cashiers could move into the hospitality industry (for example, as a hotel receptionist). Cashiers could use their experience with money to move into book-keeping or other clerical positions. With extra training and education, they could become accounting technicians.

What changes will there be in the future?
I think the demand for cashiers is likely to remain the same. Computers might speed up payment processes, but they can't replace the customer service element that cashiers provide. Therefore, I don't think the nature of our job will change much either.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?
Maintaining speed and accuracy is always a challenge, but the hardest part is dealing with the many different customers that come into the store.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?
There are plenty of opportunities. The majority of positions are part-time, so turnover is high. In some companies, applications for jobs are accepted anytime and are kept on file for a period of several months. Then they are reviewed when a vacancy occurs.

What do you like about your job?
I like getting to know my customers. After working in a shop for a while, you get to know your customers well and establish a relationship with them. I have women come in with their babies, and in no time, before my eyes, the children have grown up and are running around.

Also, I enjoy the challenge of handling the pressure of a busy shop. It gives me satisfaction to know that I can stay...
calm while I have six people lined up at my checkout who are all in a hurry to get home for dinner.

Finally, I like the unexpected opportunities that customers sometimes present me with. Customers have seen me doing my job well, and have offered me employment.

**What do you dislike about your job?**

I dislike sitting in one spot for long periods of time. My legs need to move around and it can be monotonous sitting at a checkout all day.

I also would like more challenge in my job. Once you've mastered the skills required to work on the checkout, it simply becomes a matter of repetition.

Finally, I dislike the fact that there are not a lot of opportunities to advance to new and more challenging positions.

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

I think it's most important to make yourself available, as you're more likely to be employed if you're willing to work weekends and evenings. And you have to make sure you're tidy and presentable at all times as your appearance reflects on your employer.

And lastly, enjoy it as a learning experience and a stepping stone for future things.

**A day in the life**

12:00 pm - 2:15 pm

The start of my shift. Ringing in and scanning groceries; taking money and giving change; greeting shoppers; requesting price checks.

2:15 pm - 2:30 pm

Taking a break.

2:30 pm - 4:15 pm

Ringing in and scanning groceries; taking money and giving change; greeting shoppers; requesting price checks.

4:15 pm - 4:30 pm

Taking a break.

4:30 pm - 6:15 pm

Ringing in and scanning groceries; taking money and giving change; greeting shoppers; requesting price checks.

6:15 pm - 6:30 pm

Taking a break.

6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Ringing in and scanning groceries; taking money and giving change; greeting shoppers; requesting price checks.

8:00 pm - 8:15 pm

Cleaning the register; tidying up; counting loose change; taking reports for the closing routine.