Case Study: Building Society Manager - David

What do you do?

I am manager of the head office branch of a small building society. I am responsible for running this branch and three others.

On a day-to-day basis, I deal with sales figures, seeing where we are according to targets, and I supply head office with statistics. I identify business development areas and I deal with staffing issues such as appraisals.

I use technology every day in my job; the processing of the mortgages is done on computers. For the updating of customer information, you need to have good computer systems so that you are able to identify customers' holdings in different accounts and offer a good service.

Because this is a small building society, I get involved in a wider range of issues such as staff recruitment, and mortgage interviewing with customers.

I also deal with solicitors, estate agents, mortgage brokers and independent financial advisers and some corporate customers.

What is your background?

After A levels, I briefly worked for an accountants, which I didn't enjoy, so I worked for the Department of Social Security (now the Department for Work and Pensions), and then for a finance company for three years. I enjoyed that line of business and decided to stay in the finance industry.

I joined a large building society about 12 years ago as a management trainee. It seemed an interesting career path and I liked the idea of having a cheap mortgage so it seemed like a good idea.

I worked through a structured training package and became a branch manager. That society had 450 branches at the time and I moved around the country to different branches.

I took the CeMAP exams in Mortgage Advice and Practice, and was sponsored to take other professional exams and a diploma in Management Studies.

The building society was then taken over by an even bigger building society that had become a bank. I didn't want to be a bank manager because the change in the role wasn't what I wanted. It was very much hands-off, and I wouldn't have been dealing with customers.

So I moved to the North East and worked for a smaller, more traditional, building society. I started by running one branch and ended up running three of them as an area manager. Then I moved back to the Midlands where my family is, and took this job.

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

You need to be able to communicate clearly. You need to order your work, prioritise, deal with pressure and targets, and really be able to run your own business.

If you’re a branch manager, you are responsible for everything that happens in that branch from security to staff to discipline to hitting targets. So you need to be an all-rounder, to be able to communicate with your staff, motivate a team, be a salesman and go out and get business as well as hitting targets.

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

Dependent upon your professional qualifications, once you have the Certificate in Mortgage Advice and Practice, that would open up other mortgage-based advice jobs.
As a manager, you could go into other general management positions, depending on your experience. Really, the sky's the limit, I think.

**What changes will there be in the future?**

The role itself isn't changing a great deal. Over the years, it is becoming more sales orientated.

A few years ago, there weren't mortgage targets to hit. You had targets that you didn't exceed, so you weren't allowed to lend more than a certain amount. Now you've got to lend more than a certain amount, and this is happening more and more.

The number of jobs has reduced drastically as building societies have closed or become banks. I think in the future there will be more consolidation along similar lines.

**What are the biggest challenges in your job?**

The challenging aspects of the job are keeping the team motivated, hitting your targets, which increase every year, and learning to develop your skills with customers and with staff.

Other challenges are dealing with the appraisals of the staff and developing your staff so that they can get promoted and get on in the business.

**Are there many opportunities to enter this career?**

It's hard these days and there are fewer positions advertised because there are far fewer building societies. Vacancies rarely come up because people tend to be promoted from within.

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

I enjoy the autonomy of running your own branch and making the decisions - the buck stops here. Your successes are your own, it's down to your hard work.

I like dealing with other organisations that could introduce clients to us, going out and obtaining business, seeing the team achieve and hit their targets.

Building a team and having a good working atmosphere in the branch are enjoyable parts of the job.

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

The paperwork can get very onerous from time to time. Having to deal with statistics and bits of paper, having to do regular returns to the head office or your line manager can sometimes be very tedious and time-consuming, and not very productive.

**What are your ambitions?**

Personally, I would like to become a director of the society. That for me would be the next step. I've got a wealth of experience working for different societies and also working in different locations around the country, which is quite unusual these days.

I also have the specific industry qualifications, so I would like to be a director within the next three years.

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

Write to every single bank and building society. Be honest, put a copy of your CV with a covering letter and see if there are any management training courses available. From time to time vacancies come up and you could just be lucky that yours lands on the desk of someone when a branch manager has resigned.

Try to get into some sort of management position, and that will obviously stand you in good stead. If you have been supervising others, then you can draw on the experience of that. Anything to do with financial services, mortgages and investments would be an advantage.
A day in the life

8:15 am - 9:00 am
I generally get in early, before the staff. I deal with the security of the premises. I look in the diary and check who I'm seeing today, and where.

9:00 am - 9:30 am
The telephone starts ringing. The post has been opened, so I look to see what's come in.
Check to see if any staff are off sick in which case the branch might be short-staffed. That situation would have to be dealt with.

9:30 am - 10:00 am
Interview a customer who is applying for a mortgage.

10:00 am - 1:00 pm
Go and visit a firm of estate agents that we are hoping to get business from. Followed by some visits to other introducers who haven't given the society any business for a while.

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Have a bite to eat and see what's landed on the desk in my absence. Return any phone calls. Meet my assistant manager to check on urgent issues.

2:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Approve and sign mortgage applications, catch up with paperwork and continue with phone calls.
If it's time to finalise the statistical returns, check the figures that have been compiled by my staff, summarise them and send them through to head office.