

**20. Learning to be professional:  
the story of my placement experience  
School of Management  
Secretariat Administrator in global petroleum industry**

**Details of Professional Training**

Dates: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007 to 8th July 2008

Position: Secretariat Administrator

Training: None

Duties Undertaken:

- Administration of Powers of Attorney and Proxies
- Drafting and arranging execution of legal documents
- Maintaining Sealing Registers
- Fielding questions from colleagues about company law
- Drafting Board Minutes and Company Resolutions
- Briefing Directors and Company Secretaries with detailed summaries of transactions

Hours Worked: 37.5 hours per week

Supervision: Presented task log at weekly departmental meetings

**Job Selection**

Before I began to make job applications, I decided that I would like to gain experience working for a large multinational organisation. I believed that exposure of working in an international environment will be very beneficial to my career because globalisation is a prospect facing more and more businesses these days. I felt that I would also gain valuable exposure of cross-cultural communication and other issues affecting companies operating in many countries. I also felt that I would feel more passionate about working for a company if I had already experienced their products or services. Therefore, I wanted to work for a company whom I had already experienced from a customer's perspective.

The position was advertised through the University of Surrey's Professional Training intranet site, and met the criteria I had previously identified. I already considered them one of the biggest oil companies in the world, and relished the opportunity to spend my PTY there. The placement itself would give me exposure to many different areas of the business, particularly legal and accounting.

**Evaluation of the Professional Training course**

I strongly believe that I have benefited from the Professional Training course. I now know what it is like to work within a professional environment and how my performance will contribute to the success of a team. I found the preparatory lectures in level two invaluable when trying to find a suitable placement. The lectures and arranged employers' presentations gave me many ideas about where to look for jobs, and which kind of jobs would be most suitable for me. The lectures gave me a much better idea of what to expect from participating in a Professional Training Year.

**Professional Training Tutor visits**

I found my Professional Training Tutor visits very beneficial to me. My tutor was very supportive and seemed genuinely interested in my role and performance for the company. I also found the

sessions useful to look at my job role from a different perspective, and my Tutor raised some questions that I had not previously considered.

### **Application of Level One and Two knowledge**

I found it hard to apply much of my degree knowledge to my specific job role. This may have been because I was in a department in the law function, so my position required me to use more law than business knowledge. IT skills that I gained at university were undoubtedly the most useful, as I had to work with some software packages on a daily basis. There were many aspects of organisational behaviour that were useful to me, including theories of job motivation and satisfaction that I found useful to witness in practice.

### **Evaluation of My Own Personal Development**

I have been pleased with my progress over the course of the year. I feel that wherever possible, I have fulfilled the core objectives that were agreed at the beginning of my contract. In terms of personal development, I am now able to identify new areas that require further improvement. For example, I have learnt that in some circumstances, I need to be more assertive, by being honest and expressing my feelings and opinions on matters openly. This will in turn improve my communication and customer skills.

Skills and competencies gained

- Articulation – I learnt how to articulate my ideas clearly and concisely to convey my thoughts and ideas in an efficient manner, when writing memos and emails.
- My team-working and communication skills have improved and I have learnt how to keep clients and team members updated with the status of tasks effectively.
- I have also improved at prioritising my workload and managing different tasks.

### **Training**

I received no type of formal training and no handover period. I was expected to learn 'on the job'. I found this style quite challenging as the work processes were alien to me and I could not apply knowledge from my degree directly to my job role.

### **Relationships with Management and Colleagues**

Initially, I did not find my manager very approachable. I was given very little feedback about my performance and my manager very often seemed too busy to offer me advice or to check my progress. However, after time, I realised when the best times to approach my manager would be when I had questions about specific requests. I fostered good relationships with my colleagues and feel I had earned their respect and trust when being delegated with tasks.

### **Evaluation of Goals and Objectives**

I had identified the following three personal and three professional objectives for the year:

Personal objectives:

1. To learn more about business operations and the energy industry. I feel I have achieved this objective by reading articles in newspapers, websites and magazines. I have also watched television programmes, DVDs, and attended voluntary 'Lunch and Learn' sessions in which different areas of the company are explained to employees.
2. To participate in the company's ShareMatchUK scheme. I successfully contributed part of my salary every month to the share scheme.
3. To network and make business contacts – I have kept a list of colleagues within Company Secretaries, Accounting, Legal and Tax with whom I hope to stay in contact.

### **Professional objectives:**

1. To gain experience of working in a professional environment. I now know how to use office equipment such as photocopiers, printers, and email clients. I also have a much better idea of different departments interact with each other within organisations.
2. I have developed my team-working skills. I understand that when someone is not in the office, it is important to try to cover some of their work in their absence so that the department can continue to function efficiently.
3. Overall, I found it difficult to apply most of my academic knowledge to my job role. However, I found it useful to apply some theories from organisational behaviour. I also had to apply some IT skills to every-day working practices.

### **Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses**

#### Strengths

1. I believe my work ethic continued to remain strong and I worked hard to ensure that I had completed as many tasks as possible under tight deadlines. I also learnt the importance of being proactive and finding new tasks myself rather than waiting for requests.
2. I regularly asked my manager if there were any areas in which my performance could be improved. I accepted constructive criticism and feel that I am now a more rounded employee. At appraisals I also tried to identify ways in which I could become more efficient.
3. Even when I had made mistakes in the early stages of my placement, I saw mistakes as an opportunity to learn and improve. I was always confident that I would be able to reach the level of performance expected of me.

#### Weaknesses

1. I became more organised whilst I was on placement. I always took copies of my work and filed them away for future reference and to produce an audit-trail. I also became much better at time management and was never late for work or meetings.
2. I became much better at managing different tasks. Sometimes I would have up to 50 requests that I had to prioritise in order of deadlines and importance. I became much better at understanding which requests should be dealt with first.
3. There were few opportunities for me to practice my presentation skills. I had to present a summary of my work at weekly departmental meetings. However, these presentations were never longer than 30 minutes each and I feel that I could still become better at speaking in front of an audience.

### **Personal Development**

My first few months were spent adapting to the working life and culture within the organisation, as well as learning different processes and operations. I have improved at prioritising my workload and focusing on tasks in hand. As my knowledge of the work processes increased, I became more confident in dealing with clients and building relationships both internal and external to the organisation. I have learnt the importance of communication, team working, and attention to detail.

### **Career Goals**

I think it is unlikely that I will pursue a career as a Company Secretary. I found the work too administrative and I would prefer a career where I would be able to use my creative skills in a business context. The PTY has, however, given me great knowledge about company law and corporate structures, delegations of authorities and the responsibilities of company officers. I believe all these factors will be useful to me in the future. My year of professional training has

given me a broad exposure of how international businesses operate. I have directly dealt with many different departments and functions. This broad exposure has led me in a new direction as a business analyst.

### **Conclusion**

The PTY has made me much more prepared to begin my career after graduation. Even though my placement was not in my ideal career, it has provided me with a great experience and evidence of critical business skills that future employers will require. I have been able to improve in areas that I had previously considered myself weaker. I have also been able to identify new areas for improvement such as assertiveness and communication. I am now in a much better position to apply for graduate positions.

### **Summarising Statement**

My placement has been a challenging, rewarding, and enlightening experience that has given me many transferable skills that I will be able to take forward with me in my future career.