youth employ

Maximizing the internship experience for everyone

Interview Skills

Project No. 2014-1-IE01-KA202-000375

Introduction

Job interviews can be very stressful situations. However the more prepared you are, the more confident you will. It will also be less likely that you will be asked a question that throws you off and leads to you stuttering or sitting in silence while you frantically come up with an answer. This booklet will tell you what you should research, what questions you will be asked and how to answer then so that you can enter your interview calm, confident and prepared. Remember, failing to prepare is preparing to fail!

Step 1: MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

Studies show that it takes just seven seconds for someone to form an opinion of you! The good news is that you can control what image of yourself that you project to your interviewer. To succeed in projecting the most professional, competent and enthusiastic image possible, please take note of the following:

- ### Punctuality
  Arrive early. If you are unfamiliar with the interview location you should figure out the route well in advance. Perhaps you could drive the route the day before the interview. Check public transport options in advance and leave in plenty of time to allow for traffic etc.

- ### Arrive Ready
  Arrive ready. Your interview starts as soon as you arrive at the interview premises. Ensure you are friendly and polite to everyone you meet. Make sure your phone is switched off and you are calm and prepared.

- ### Dress
  Dress professionally. If in doubt wear a suit.

- ### Grooming
  Hair should be clean and styled conservatively. Ladies should avoid excessive make up and jewellery. Remove facial piercings and cover visible tattoos. Don't wear or display anything that may be distracting to the interviewers.

- ### Handshake
  Whenever you meet an interviewer, a handshake is a typical greeting. Interviewers will expect a reasonably firm handshake. A firm handshake will project confidence. Interviewees should ensure their hands are clean, dry and that they accompany a handshake with a warm smile and direct eye contact.

- ## Body Language
  Body language conveys all sorts of messages and the right body language will convey the message of a well-balanced and confident individual. Send the right messages by standing straight, moving confidently and sitting slightly forward in your chair. Make eye contact with all interviewers. Avoid defensive or aggressive body language such as folded arms, leaning too far forward or putting elbows on the table.

- ## Establish Rapport
  Smile, be friendly, look the person in the eye and use their name when speaking to them. If there is more than one interviewer, ensure that you address all of them.

Step 2: PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Good preparation and an awareness of common interview procedures will give you the confidence you need to perform well during interviews.

Interviews give you the opportunity to tell the employer that you are the person for the job by highlighting the skills and experience that are set out in the job spec by the prospective employer. Imagine the job spec to be a checklist for the interviewer. The easier you make it for the interviewer to tick the boxes off their checklist, the more likely you are to get the job!

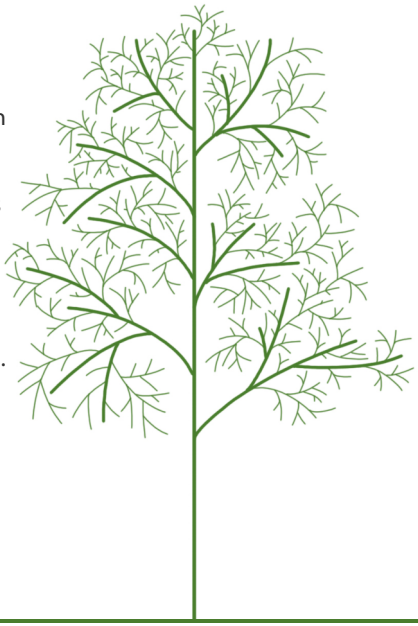
Take a number of practical steps to ensure that you are well prepared and confident.

1. Know the Job Description

It is important to know the job description in detail. When preparing for interviews, highlight the key skills and duties mentioned on the job description so you can prepare questions and answers around them. Be sure to highlight instances where you learnt or demonstrated these key skills or duties in your previous work history or studies.

2. Know your CV

Sit down with your CV and ensure that you can talk through it in sequence and can elaborate on every item. Review your past achievements and be prepared to describe your work experience in detail. Be prepared to talk about any point on your CV in the interview, including hobbies and achievements etc.



3. Research the Company

Some interviewers will ask you directly what you know about their company. Take this opportunity to show them that you have done your research thoroughly by telling them all that you know about the company, their area of business, their reputation, their locations etc. Deliver your knowledge with positivity and enthusiasm.

Other interviewers will not ask you what you know about the company. In this case it is up to you to integrate your company knowledge with your answers throughout the interview. For example if they ask you why you want to work for their company, you could mention that you have researched the company and mention information you found on their website or other media outlets etc.

4. Prepare and Practice Frequently Asked Questions

Although interviews vary from company to company and position to position, there are some 'frequently asked questions', answers to which can be prepared in advance of the interview.

FAQs and how to answer them are included in the annex to this booklet.
Draft possible answers to questions, along with possible variations that might be required. Practice delivering your answers aloud, either to yourself or with a friend or family member.

5. STAR Stories

STAR Stories is a particular method of answering certain types of interview questions. These questions generally ask you about a specific example or incident where you demonstrated a particular skill or took a particular action. Examples of these type of questions include:

"Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult customer"

"Describe a situation where you had to use your initiative"

STAR stands for the following:

Situation	Give some detail about the context. Where were you – work or college etc? When did the event take place?
Task	What was the challenge or problem you were faced with? What needed to be done or achieved? Why?
Action	What action did YOU take specifically? The action you took should demonstrate the trait or skill you were asked about i.e. if you were asked about initiative, the action should show initiative on your part.
Result	Elaborate the results of your action i.e. recognition, achievement etc. Quantify if possible i.e. savings made. Keep this part positive.

Trying to choose an incident or event and remember all the relevant details on the spot is extremely difficult. Therefore it is advisable to pre-prepare a selection of STAR stories in advance of your interview. Many STAR stories can be tailored to fit several questions. For example, the story used below could be used to demonstrate excellent customer services skills, initiative or problem solving skills or how you dealt with a difficult customer / situation etc.

EXAMPLE

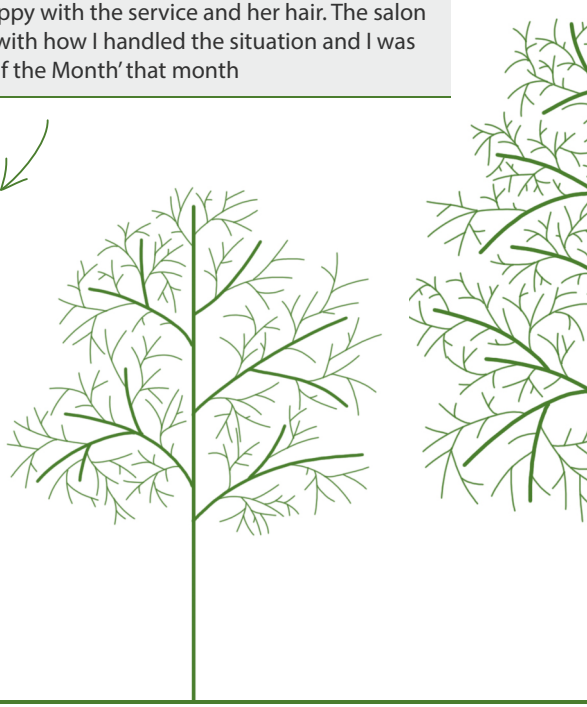
Q. Can you tell us about a time you had to demonstrate excellent customer service?

Situation	I was working in a hair dressing salon as a receptionist. It was a busy Saturday morning and we were fully booked up for the day
Task	A customer came in to get her hair done. She said she had made an appointment but it was not in the appointments book and we were too busy to look after her. It was her daughter's wedding that day and she was very angry as she was a regular customer and had made a booking in advance
Action	Rather than turn her away and lose a valued customer, I rang another stylist who was due in later that day and asked if she could come in earlier, which she could. After a short wait the customer was taken care of and I apologised for the error
Result	The customer was very happy with the service and her hair. The salon manager was very happy with how I handled the situation and I was later awarded 'Employee of the Month' that month

More examples of STAR story questions and answers are included in the annex to this booklet

6. Brief your referees

Ensure that each of your referees are up to date and aware that you are job hunting. Ask them if it ok that they remain as one of your referees. If so, advise them they may receive a call. Inform them of what roles you have applied for so that they may tailor their reference accordingly.



INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Face to face interviews are still the most popular form of interview. However increasingly other formats are being used, usually to save time or money or to facilitate candidates who live too far from the company premises to travel.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are being used more and more by employers and it is important that you are prepare for this as seriously as you would a face-to-face interview. The purpose of a telephone interview is often to check out whether you are a serious applicant, so prepare for 'Why this career/company?', 'What do you have to offer?' type questions.

As much of the impact you make will come through the tone of your voice, it is important that you sound enthusiastic. Try imagining that the other person is in the room and you are talking directly to them. In telephone interviews, it can be easier to hide nerves and relax. Although you can't be seen, some people find it helpful to change into formal clothes to get into a business-like frame of mind. Also, if you smile it will come across in your voice.

Tip: Try not to accept a position on the basis of a telephone interview only. It will be difficult to assess the culture of the organisation without visiting their offices.
Tips for telephone interviews:

1. Ensure you have a suitable environment where you won't be disturbed. No children, pets or other noises in the background!
2. Have your CV or completed application and company research next to you.
3. Practice before you phone or take the phone call.
4. Consider standing as it can make you feel more confident and in control.
5. Say thank you at the end of the interview and send a thank you note an hour or two after the phone interview.

Skype Interview

Skype, a video chat software, has provided a way to interview right from your own computer and offers the ability to interview around the world. It is free to download and you can make Skype to Skype video calls for free. All you need for a Skype interview is a computer, internet access, a microphone and a webcam.

Similar to telephone interviews, increasingly many companies are using this type of interview in order to save time, money and to facilitate overseas candidates. Also like phone interviews, you should take your Skype interview seriously and treat it like a face to face interview, ensuring you capture the interviewer's attention.

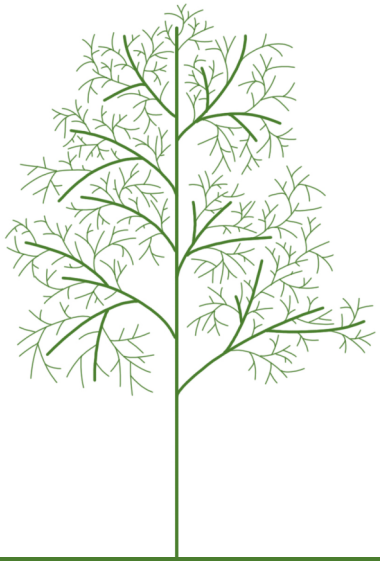
Tips for Skype interviews:

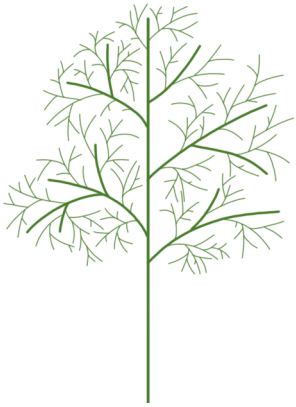
1. **As when meeting in person, strive to create a great first impression.**
2. **Maintain direct eye contact throughout the interview.**
3. **Be yourself - Relax, smile and let your personality shine through.**
4. **Practice on Skype before the interview.**
5. **Speak slowly and clearly and set the sound on the microphone so it's not too loud where it will create static.**
6. **Create a background that's simple and not cluttered.**
7. **As with the phone interview, ensure there are no background noises or distractions (dogs barking etc.)**
8. **Be sure to sit up and maintain a straight posture.**
9. **Dress for success as if it were an in-person interview.**

Face to Face Interviews

Being called for interview tells you that you have persuaded the employer that you have the suitable skills and experience for the job. The purpose of an interview is to further investigate whether what represents you on paper reflects you in person. Remember an employer WANTS you to be the right person! iews, Telephone Interviews etc.)

A typical interview can last anything from 30 minutes to an hour and will usually include several distinct parts. Interviews have many formats (Competency Based Interviews, Technical Interviews, Group Interviews, Video/Skype Interviews, Panel Interviews, One-to-one Interviews, Telephone Interviews etc.)





However, all interviews tend to follow the same format which includes the following

Introduction

This is the "icebreaking" portion of the interview. Introductions will take place and the interviewer will establish a positive atmosphere and put the interviewee at ease. Some opening questions may include 'Why did you decide to apply for this position?', 'Tell me a bit about yourself' or you may be asked to talk the interviewer through your CV.

Body

This will be the main body of the interview and will take up the bulk of the interview. This will contain the key questions determining your qualifications, job responsibilities, operations and policies. As the interviewee, you will usually be expected to talk through your CV at this stage. The important thing to remember here is to refer back to the job requirements as much as possible and make connections between your past work experience and skills with the job you are applying for. Give concrete examples of your relevant skills using STAR stories.

Close

An employer will invariably ask you if you would like to ask questions at the end of the interview. You should always have some prepared. Prepare at least 3 questions related to the job (refer to the job description, the company, the role). Avoid questions about hours, money or perks or benefits at this stage - you want to appear interested in the role / company rather than what you can get for yourself. The candidate should then be given an outline of the 'next steps' in the process and the likely timescale of when he/she will be notified of the outcome of the interview. Ask for these details if they are not provided.

Top Tips

1. Ask Questions

Be sure to have at least 3 job or company related questions prepared. This shows the interviewers that you are interested in and enthusiastic about the role. Failing to ask questions will make you appear disinterested.

2. Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

The need to prepare cannot be overstated. Have answers to FAQs and Star Story type questions prepared and be able to deliver your answers calmly and with confidence. If possible, do a role play with friends or family and get them to give you feedback on the areas where you can improve.

3. Project a Professional Image

The duration of an interview is relatively short and so how you present yourself is important in terms of how the interviewer perceives you. Dress in a professional manner and be friendly, open, polite and confident. If you don't feel confident then do some further preparation to ensure you are confident. Failing that, pretend!

Things to Avoid

1. Negativity

We all have previous jobs, bosses or colleagues we don't like. However a job interview is not the appropriate place to discuss them! Avoid speaking negatively about your previous employment, manager etc. and be prepared to put a positive spin on difficult situations you have encountered. Candidates can appear dismissive of their own achievements or lacking in confidence by using words like "just" or "only". For example "I was just an office junior" or "my only job was to process refunds and exchanges". Keep an eye out for this when you are practising delivering your answers and avoid using this type of language.

2. Speaking Too Little or Too Much

All of your answers should be concise, easily understood and most importantly should answer the question you have actually been asked. If your answers are too long, the interviewer may think that you are rambling and will lose interest. Answers that are too short will require prompting from the interviewer, which not all will have the patience for!

3. Lying

Whether it's embellishing a story to make yourself good or telling an out and out lie, you will more than often be caught out. It can be tempting to tell a little white lie when you feel the answer will decide the outcome of the interview, however it is always best to be honest in interviews. You never know, something you say in your interview may come back to haunt you later on.

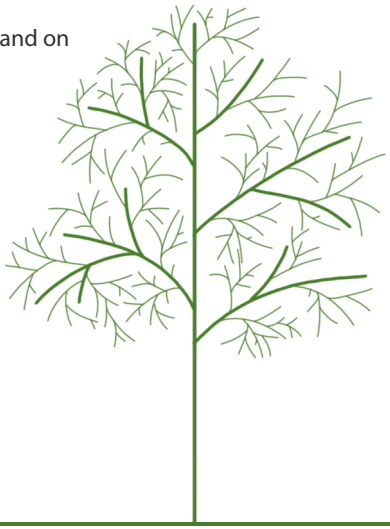
DOS AND DON'TS OF INTERVIEWS

- ✓ Listen! The interviewer will be telling you important facts about the job, don't miss them!
- ✓ Dress professionally. First impressions count. Smile, show enthusiasm and interest in the job and company
- ✓ Research the Company
- ✓ Remember the interviewer's name
- ✓ Prepare questions to ask related to the job and the company
- ✓ Turn off your mobile
- ✓ Address each interviewer equally
- ✓ Bring extra copies of your CV to the interview

- ✗ Ask about money, benefits or hours in the first interview
- ✗ Speak badly about past employers
- ✗ Be dishonest
- ✗ Give one worded answers
- ✗ Be late!!
- ✗ Chew chewing gum
- ✗ Lounge back in your chair
- ✗ Make negative statements

Remember!

- Emphasise that you are the person for the job; use a confident tone, maintain good eye contact, firm handshakes
- Know your CV
- Rehearse answers to questions, reinforce and expand on what you have written in your CV
- Dress Appropriately – if in doubt wear a suit
- Smile and relax once in the interview



Annex 1

Frequently Asked Questions

What are your strengths?

Choose three characteristics that are relevant to the role and be able to demonstrate why and how you are strong in those areas. Give examples of how you used your strengths in a work situation. If they ask for your 'strength' (singular), just give them one characteristic.

What are your weaknesses?

Never say you don't have a weakness…everybody does! The key here is to acknowledge a realistic weakness and show how you are working on it.

- Avoid examples such as:

  I'm a perfectionist

  This isn't a weakness per se but could indicate to the interviewer that you may not be able to meet deadlines.

- *I take on too much work (can you not prioritise your own work and manage your time?)*

- *I always have to be on time*

  That's not a weakness. Similarly, this should not be given as a strength or a key skill, it should go without saying that you will be on time for work.

So how do I answer it?

Pick something that is a weakness relevant to the role, but will not entirely stop you from doing the job.

Example 1: I have extensive experience working with Microsoft Operating Systems, but I haven't used Linux before. However, I am a quick learner and know I will pick it up very quickly once shown how to use it.

Example 2: I used to be quite nervous about speaking in public, but I actually joined Toastmasters (a public-speaking club) last year and am about to do my Level 4 speech. I have found that it has greatly increased my confidence but it is something I will continue to work on.

Example 3: I have an excellent aptitude for Word and Powerpoint, but I am not entirely happy with my knowledge of Excel. I am doing an extra course online to up-skill in this area.

What are your greatest accomplishments?
Prepare one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you appear attractive to your new employer.

How would your previous work colleagues describe you?
Another opportunity to convey your strengths.

How do you handle tension/ stress?
You could say that you have found in the past that "good planning and organisation tends to prevent tension or stress".

How good are you under intense deadline pressure?
Always be positive. The answer to this type of question is "very good". Deadlines are common in work. Use one or two examples to illustrate. The key is to plan and prioritise appropriately.

How do you deal with criticism?
Mention that criticism is vital to your continued growth, and that you welcome constructive criticism that helps a team operate better together or produce better results.

Do you work better alone or as part of a team?
Never sound too extreme one way or another. A healthy balance between the two is always the best choice. Use previous work examples to illustrate that you can work alone and with others.

What would your referees say about you?
Another opportunity to highlight your strengths. Keep it work related obviously and highlight strengths that are relevant to that role in particular.

What personal goals do you have and how are you going about achieving them?
Prepare for this – be able to state your personal and career goals – keep them reasonable, achievable and balanced. Explain how you see the steps to reaching your goals. Be able to demonstrate that you have thought and planned each step carefully.

What are your career goals?
Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:
Short term - "I want to be the best in my current position, while earning additional responsibilities. This, I hope, will assure my commitment to the organisation and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
Long term - "After proving my abilities, I see myself in an organisation with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

What are you doing to achieve your goals?
Give an example of a goal that you have, either educational or professional and outline how you intend to achieve that.

What interests you about this position/company?
As with any job interview, you should research the company and show that you are interested in what they do and what you can learn from them. Know a little about the company history, know their products and services, clients and competitors and why the company appeals to you specifically.

What kind of worker are you?
Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable, but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

How do you plan and organise your work?
Mention that you think about the work first and ask for appropriate advice if it is a complicated or new task. State that you always prioritise your work and in doing so distinguish between urgent and important. If in doubt you always check with your direct line manager.

What have you learned from the jobs that you have held?
This is an opportunity to summarise your experience from a learning perspective, mention both the task aspects of work as well as the people relationships. Keep it relevant to the job you are now applying for.

What kind of role do you see yourself in when you qualify/finish your work experience?
Show that you are interested in the area in which you are doing your work experience. You never know, they could have a job for you! Have a vision, know the direction you want to move in by outlining your long term career goals.

What do you know about our company?
Research the company thoroughly (through the website, LinkedIn, business library etc.) in order to answer this question effectively. Prepare in advance and this question should pose no problem. Focus on key areas (company history, clients, services, products, why you want to work there).

Why do you want this position?
Your answer should include what you consider to be interesting aspects of the job. Use key words such as "challenges and opportunities". Refer to the job description and match your skills to the requirements of the job.

Are you willing to work overtime?
If this weren't an aspect of the job, they would not be asking this question. You should state yes and use this question to illustrate that you are a flexible individual.

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Some of the work involved is quite routine and repetitive. How do you feel about this?

A possible answer could be "I know this position requires routine work, but I don't expect to start at the top…" or "Routine is part of every job and indeed part of life. It can be good to know what you need to do at the start of every day!"

Why should we hire you over other applicants? Why are you the best person for this job?

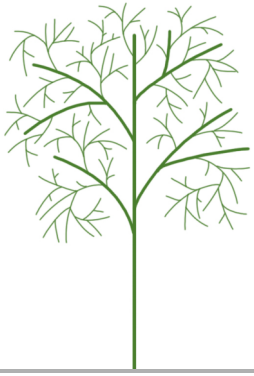
Do not ramble on this question. Remember to focus on the job specification and link in relevant previous experiences. Demonstrate that you have the relevant skills and experience by referring to the job description and giving specific examples of the skills and experience you have that relate directly to the job. Be positive and enthusiastic.

What important trends do you see in our industry?

This question requires focus and preparation. You need to be able to speak knowledgeably about the industry.

How long would you stay with us? Where do you see yourself in five years?

A sample answer could be "As long as we both feel I'm contributing, achieving, growing ….". The employer is looking for your commitment to stay in this role for a given period of time if you were offered this position. Remember it takes at least 3 months and a lot of time and effort to hire someone and get them to the stage where they can work independently. Saying that 'you see yourself in a position such as the one on offer, having mastered it and assumed extra responsibilities' would be a good example of commitment to the role.



Frequently Asked STAR Story Questions

Tell us about a time where you used your communication/multi-tasking/ interpersonal/delegation skills.

Use STAR stories to answer these competency questions. When you are planning for these, look at the key skills outlined on the job specification and on your CV to give you an indication as to what kind of competency question they will ask.

How well do you handle change?

The only acceptable answer is that you handle change very well. Don't just make this claim; offer an example of how well you coped with change in a working environment (use a STAR story).

STAR Story Examples

EXAMPLE 1

Interviewer asks: Can you give me an example of a time when you had to work in a team?

Situation	Yes, while working as a cashier in Tesco I had to serve customers at the till.
Task	One time I had no customers to assist, but my co-worker was busy with a large customer purchase.
Action	On this occasion I walked over to help with bagging.
Result	The result is that the customer left satisfied with speedy check-out and my co-worker was very appreciative that I chose to help them out.

EXAMPLE 2

Interviewer asks: Can you give me an example of a time you used your own initiative?

Situation	Yes. When I worked in my local restaurant as a waitress a family required a table for four.
Task	It was a busy Sunday afternoon and there was only a small table for two available at the time.
Action	There was a table for four with only two people sitting at it. I discreetly asked the table for two if they would mind moving tables to the table for two.
Result	The two people at the table happily agreed, I ensured that they got extra attention and that they were satisfied with the service. I also made sure to thank them when they were leaving for their assistance. The table of four was delighted and the restaurant didn't have to lose any customers

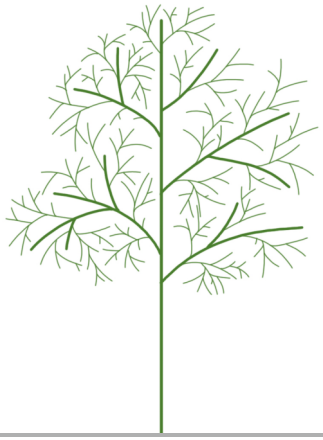
EXAMPLE 3

Interviewer asks: Can you tell me about a time when you dealt with a difficult customer?

Situation	Yes, I worked in Smyth's Toy Store in the run-up to Christmas. As you can imagine this can be a very busy period.
Task	One day, I had a customer who was very angry that the toy he had planned to purchase for his child was completely sold out. He started shouting at me, blaming me for the lack of stock
Action	I calmly spoke to him, assuring him that I understood his problem and that if he gave me a minute, I would do everything in my power to try and help him. He calmed down slightly, which gave me the time to look up stock in another of our stores. I was able to reserve a toy for him to collect at another store
Result	He thanked me for my action and apologised for his shouting. I learned to be patient, not take it personally, and do what I could to resolve the situation calmly.

More information about the project

http://**youthemploy**.eu/



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