

A Day in the Life of Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware

Oh, how dull and boring this sounds! What in the world possessed me to write this??

You'd think that working at a grocery store was the easiest thing in the world, requiring only a little smarts – that's brains, not smart-alec smarts, although one could argue that there are plenty of both around here. I mean, what could there be to opening a cardboard box and placing a few cans or boxes of food on the shelves? Or standing at the checkstand, sliding items over the scanner, watching the electronics handle all of the complexities of payment processing, price management, and cash handling?

Fast food restaurants and grocery stores are the classic "entry-level" job portals for high school and college students, offering them basic job experience that makes it easier to get the next job. That is, if we even value getting jobs and contributing to the social fabric of our society anymore.

So you'd think that the high schools and colleges would direct motivated students to work at these kinds of places in order to smooth their paths into the adult working world. But no, at least in the past, our high school never invited us to a Career Day. (Who'd want a career in the Grocery or Hardware business, anyway? Ewww.) One year when we did go to a career day, our people were laughed at and ridiculed, as if such a job were beneath the students' dignity. What they don't know! We never went back.

So you think it's a simple job for stupid people, huh? Let's walk around our store and look some of the departments and see what the staffers have to do.

1. The Front End consists of the front office,

Service Counter, check-stands, and the merchandise displayed there – candy, gifts, magazines, books, tin signs, candles, videos, greeting cards, flowers and plants, and much more. Contessa, the Front End Manager,



and I estimate that she has to deal with at least 30 suppliers to keep interesting stuff around her front end. Then there are 30 staffers who report directly to Contessa, who need to be trained to operate the electronics that make it look so easy. They have to know state and county regulations that affect what kinds of customers can buy what kind of stuff with what kind of payment, all the while knowing that some bureaucratic punk who has never held a real job can show up at any time and do an inspection or a sting, to be sure these people are doing their jobs right. (No, I don't have an attitude about that. Hahahahahahaha ...)

They also have to be amateur psychologists, able to deal with dozens of people in one shift at the cash register, hoping that they don't become the target of a grumpy person having a bad day. All the while, the phones are ringing, com-lines are coming, walkie-talkies are talking, and people who need something are coming up the steps to the front office, adding one more layer of confusion to the chaos all around them. Three people called out sick today. How do we solve it? Hardware isn't answering their phone. People are waiting at the Service Counter. Get someone to help. And on and on and on.

2. Walk to the left and into the Hardware Dept. The manager, Bill Lembright (aka Sir William) is famous among many for his rushing around, doing five things at once.

If you walk his department and see a dark blue blur pass by, you're not going crazy or having a stroke. It's probably Bill. Hardware and Variety also has many suppliers they must buy from, and it's probably over 50. Each of those must be monitored, ordered, checked in, and placed somewhere on the shelf. It ranges from wood-burning stoves to stationery supplies to electrical and plumbing parts to housewares to keys to ammo to garden stuff to coolers and water heaters.

Stihl power equipment, car batteries, and snow chains all require paperwork to be filled out.



3. Keep going down Aisle 1, but don't look at the floors because they're AWFUL. It's hard to get good outfits who do work like that affordably. (Actually, by the time you read this, the floors will have been deep cleaned, we hope.) All of Aisle 1 – soft drinks, alcoholic beverages and liquor, bottled water and the dairy box, are

managed by Carrie, along with her other HUGE responsibility of receiving deliveries at both receiving doors, the docks on the north side and the street-level doors on the south side.

That sounds kind of tame, doesn't it? Coke, Pepsi, and 7Up send salesmen and merchandisers to write orders and stock merchandise, except when they don't. What could be so tough? Hahahahahahaha! (I think I've gone over the edge of insanity by now!) Carrie probably has 20 vendors to deal with just for her own department, but then she must be interrupted constantly by the ringing of the bell at both ends of the back room, stopping what she's doing, and checking in all of the other departments' suppliers. Potato chips, beverage and more beverage, milk, UPS, FedEx (2 kinds), Post Office bringing 30 boxes of Amazon, Contessa's 30 supplier orders, Sir William's 50 supplier orders, all day and every day. Liquor deliveries, eggs, UPS bringing hardware packages from other warehouses to fill empty holes. Bread guys, Little Debbie, Mission tortillas, Bimbo cakes (can you BELIEVE that name??). I ADMIRE how Carrie maintains her composure and sanity under that onslaught of shtuff. Well, mostly.

4. Around the back of the store is the Produce Department, managed by Shelly. If



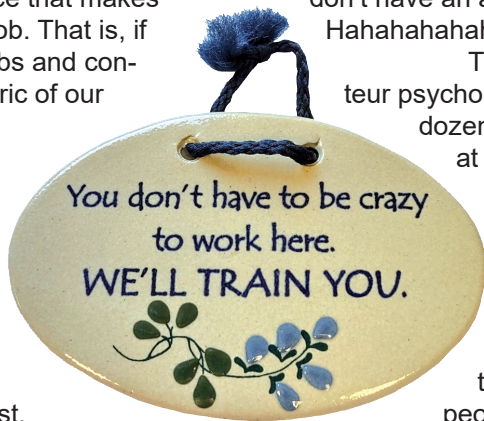
you don't know Shelly yet, find her and meet her. What a character! Dry humor punctuated by mischievous glares. Shelly keeps the produce rotated and fresh, as well as the backroom people smiling at her little antics. Don't forget to look up and see what creative display she has placed on the top of her produce case. If you get a crick in your neck looking at it, you can blame Shelly.

5. Around the corner, walking toward the front of the store, you pass through Mark's domain, the Meat Department. He has to keep up with all kinds of perishable merchandise – cheeses, dips, lunchmeats, frozen meats and fish, and "unfrozen" meat. He must know what the patterns will be for the day, the week, and the season, and then cut meat accordingly. Since it's been impossible to hire experienced meat cutters, Mark has had to train his people from scratch. Talk about another character! There is humor in abundance around these departments! If you ever see Mark wearing his ball cap sideways with a funny look on his face, you can bet he's having a reasonably good day!

Oops. Now I ran too long, and I've filled up the space. I'm going to have continue this next week. Stay tuned for the next EXCITING episode of "A Day in the Life of Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware." You'll visit Sarah in the Deli Café, Ken Klaus-the-Louse in the Grocery department, and best of all (ahem, ahem), the Wonderful Women of the West (west wall of the store), aka the Back Office! A-a-a-and I might tell you a secret or two while I'm at it. Oh, I almost forgot, Joe in his Kingdom of Maintenance.

Bet you can't wait!!!

Linda Gimmel



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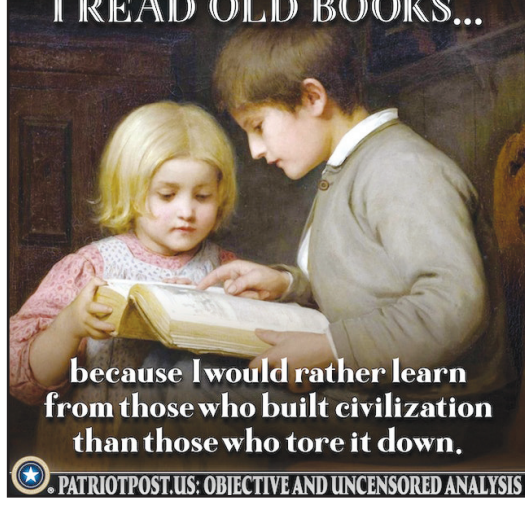
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