

Narrative: Aimee Vero, Tech Bookstore Sales Associate

Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewer: Dorothy Vu

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I've been a sales associate at the Tech Bookstore for about a year. Two summers ago, one of my sorority sisters got a job at Tech bookstore, and she told me that I should apply there as well. I applied to a couple other places and I had some interviews, but Tech Bookstore was the one place that hired me pretty much on the spot.

On a typical day of work, I am mostly helping customers, especially when there's something out on the floor that they would like to purchase but cannot find. I usually help them locate the item. If the item is not out on the shelves, I will retrieve it for them from the backroom. If I'm working with textbook distribution, I usually help customers find out if there's a book that they need as requested by their professor. I basically just help customers get everything that they need.

Sometimes it'll be really slow and sometimes it'll be really busy. As a sales associate, you have to be able to balance everything out because sometimes scheduling could be a conflict if it's really busy at the store. If I'm not working during a specific season such as football season, I usually work around 20 to 30 hours per week. If it's one of our busier seasons, I usually work close to 40 hours per week.

If it's not a busy day, not too much happens. Usually during football season we get a lot of adamant Hokie fans, and they're dressed up in crazy outfits, and that's usually entertaining. And sometimes we have people from the visiting schools out of town and they'll be in their crazy costumes. Sometimes they'll just be running around our store and shouting things like "whoa hokies!" It's usually kind of fun to watch all of the different people who come into our store.

I actually enjoy being a Sales Associate. I especially like being able to help people. I know that when I go out shopping and I can't find something, it's always helpful to have someone help me find the things that I would like to purchase. I also like the people that I work with; they're not too overbearing and they're not slackers when it comes to doing their job. I think most of our employees have been treated fairly as well.

I think the most rewarding part about this job is when we're able to satisfy our customers. I like being able to help them find exactly what they need in a timely matter. It's

always nice when we're able to help them locate something, and then they leave the store really happy about it. And keeping them satisfied also helps them come back and do more business with us.

I guess some people think that our job is just, you know, pretty laid back because we're just supposed to know where everything is, but sometimes it gets complicated if things are out of place when we're trying to find it. I think it's important for them to know that we're actually trying. I know at some stores, some of the employees are just like, "oh we don't have anything" or, "sorry we're all out" without bothering to put much effort in finding the item that their customer is looking for. It's important for people to know that we actually do care if we help them find something and we really do want to help them find it. And we put in the effort even if we cannot find an item.

I think one of the hardest things to deal with is an unsatisfied customer. Customers tend to get aggravated if we don't have what they want in the store or if we're taking too long to find something. They also get mad when a worker makes a mistake and mislabels the price on an item and so they get charged something different from the actual price. It's hard when people argue with you and think that they know how your store is supposed to be run. It's just hard keeping a level head and trying to help them find a solution without angering them.

Generally, a person in my position would need to be, you know, pretty outgoing and able to talk to people in an orderly fashion. You can't really be ill-tempered or short-tempered. Sometimes customers will argue and you'll just have to, you know, communicate with them the best way that you can. So effective communication is definitely a big trait that sales associates need. Being able to have an up-beat personality is always good because I don't think a lot of our customers would want to approach you if you're just kind of just moping around the store. You have to make sure that you're able to work with other people and able to deal with customers well. So it's good to be pretty sociable and just be able to communicate attentively.

The work schedule is really flexible and it's pretty easy to take days off as long as I tell the managers a few weeks ahead of time and not just say, "oh I need to get off tomorrow." I have to let them know and also try to help them figure out who else can cover any shifts that they need covered. Usually I can take off days that some of the students take off if my family wants to visit or wants me to visit then. Or if there is just an emergency that comes up, they're pretty good about it. As long as it's in a timely manner, they're pretty lenient about when I can get days off.

I think when you get a raise it's not that good of a raise. I could be working a lot harder than other people, but we all would still get the same wage. I'm not exactly sure how people usually get a raise, but I think it might be if you worked at least a year or something like that. I think they do an annual review and then that's when they let you know if you got a raise or anything. Maybe it would be better if they based the wages a little more on how hard you work or how much you work.

I am not planning to stay in this job forever. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do after I graduated, so I thought it would be a good idea to at least stay in Blacksburg, get a job, and try to figure out what I wanted to do. And that's how I ended up with a job at Tech Bookstore. I thought that I'd at least be able to save up money if I wanted to move somewhere else. I think there could be more opportunities here, but I just have to actually look for them. I just have to keep an open mind about what else I can do. Right now, this is just time to figure out what I really want to do I guess.

I think I've always had an interest in theater. In college, I mostly had an interest in musicals, but I also really liked going to plays and shows and I really liked performing. After I graduated, I actually ended up realizing that I do like performing, but not for shows that do not involve singing or dancing. I think I really liked performing as a dancer more. Ideally, if I weren't working for this job, I would want to be dancing somewhere. I've been trying to see if I can find somewhere I could maybe teach dance to younger kids, and then at least try to get into a dancing career through that.

After I graduated, I just started volunteering. I found out that I actually like building the sets for shows and helping to construct them as well. During my time at Tech, I was trying to focus more on performing, so I didn't really realize my passion for set construction. I would not like to do set designing, which is an issue because it is usually a part of set construction. I'm torn between wanting to be a dancer and wanting to be an assistant in building. So right now, I'm trying to figure out how to go about reaching one of those two.

Hopefully, in five to ten years, I will not be working here anymore. I've been trying to look at different colleges to see how I could be able to go back to undergrad as a dance major. I would probably see myself at least somewhere in the performing field.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.