

Free  
practice exercise  
with model  
answers

# Practice In-Tray Exercise

Graduate Retail Banking

February 2011

## Instructions

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Please read the instructions on this page, then turn over the page to begin the exercise.

Your assistant has left 13 items (documents) on your desk marked for your attention. These appear in a variety of formats including emails, letters, reports and web pages, just as you would use in an office environment. Some of these items may appear to describe isolated issues, while others link to one or more of the other items. A summary listing each item is provided for you on a subsequent page.

You need to review each item and then need to provide the following:

- A list of actions, written in brief, which include your analysis of the key issues in each of the 13 items.
- The priority that you would assign for dealing with each item. Please use these 3 categories: *high priority*, *medium priority*, and *low priority*. When determining these, a balance needs to be struck between *urgent* tasks (that need to be completed as soon as possible) and *important* tasks (that have a high impact on the business).
- Please include who should be involved. For example, if you want to forward an item to a colleague, or if you want to call a meeting.

You have **90 minutes** in which to complete this task. You are strongly advised to spend the first 5-10 minutes reviewing the documents as a whole before considering actions pertaining to each item. There is a template at the end of this file for you to enter your Actions and Priority Ratings.

**The exercise begins on the next page.**

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## Background Information

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### Role

Your name is Alex Jennings and you joined Borough Bank through one of its Graduate Trainee Programmes. Since finishing your 2-year Graduate Trainee programme you have been working as a Team Leader at a busy London branch. You completed graduate placements in a number of High Street branch operations and different Head Office functions.

Borough Bank is a relatively small bank focused on sales of typical retail banking products at its High Street branches throughout the UK. Each branch has two teams providing services and selling different savings, mortgage and credit card products to the following segments: Regular and Prestige (high wealth) segments.

Because of your strong performance in your current role, the Regional Manager has requested that you be seconded in to help a struggling High Street branch in Sisley – a market town in Surrey. The role is to act as the Interim Retail Manager, managing two Team Leaders and improving the branch's performance in a difficult economic climate.

You see the promotion as an excellent opportunity to put what you have learnt about management into practice. Although the Regional Manager made it clear that he will be too busy to offer much day-to-day support, you do have his authority to take whatever decisions you feel are necessary.

The Sisley branch has had difficulty finding a suitable person to fill this position since the previous job incumbent went on long-term sick-leave (due to stress) at the end of September 2010. This situation has left a number of outstanding issues, some more urgent than others. The Branch Manager has asked for regular updates, so you are advised not to defer any important issues. You can delegate suitable tasks to your Assistant, Fred Lopez.

Today is Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 – your first day as Sisley's Interim Retail Manager.

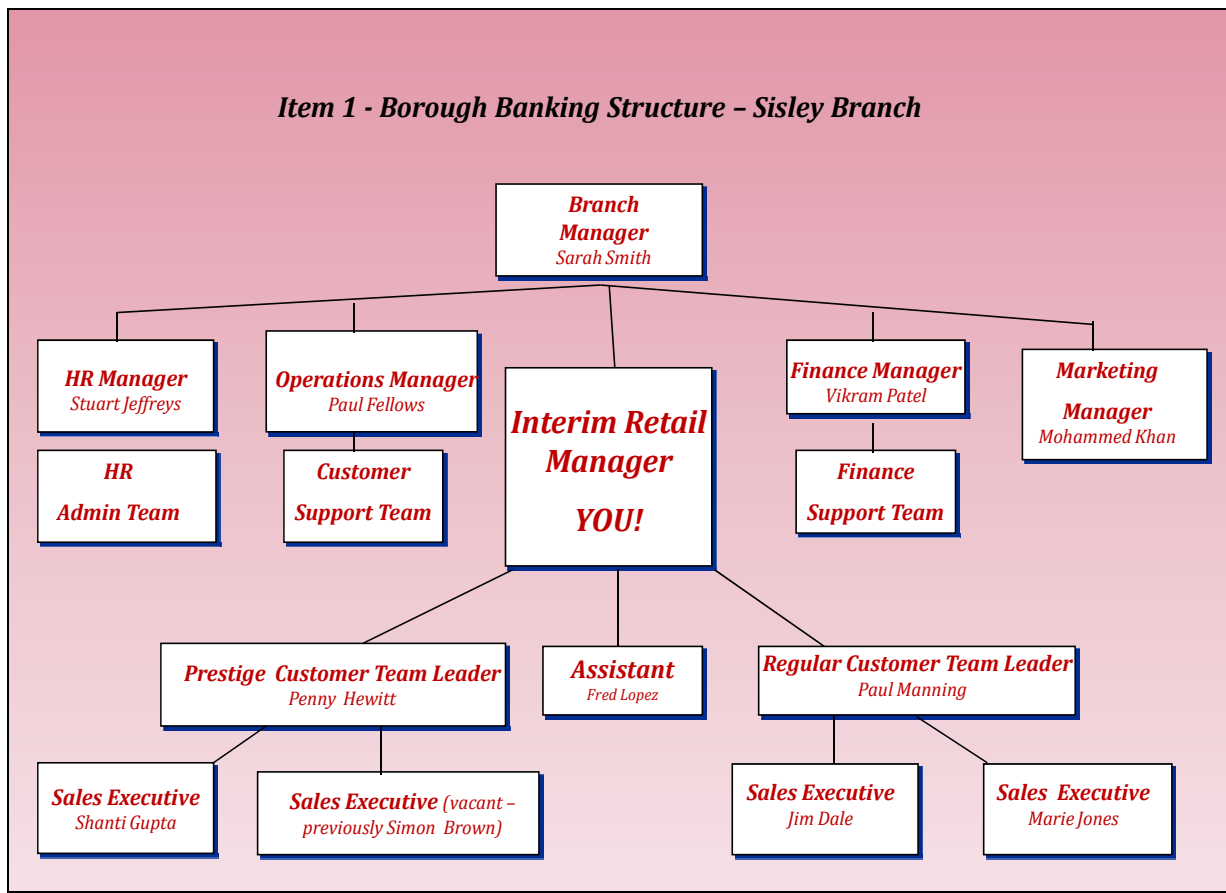
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## Summary of in-tray items: Document number and Title

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Doc	Document Title
1	Structure of Sisley Branch
2	Branch Manager Note
3	Sales Against Target
4	Resignation Letter
5	Staff Opinion Survey Results
6	Borough Bank Web Pages
7	Team Performance Review
8	Customer Complaint Letter 1
9	Email Chain 1
10	Minutes of the Last Sales Innovation Group Meeting
11	Email Chain 2
12	Training Workshop Email
13	Memo from Operations Manager

**Item 1 - Borough Banking Structure - Sisley Branch**



## Item 2 – Branch Manager Note

### CONFIDENTIAL

**To:** Alex Jennings  
**From:** Sarah Smith  
**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> November 2010

#### **Re: New Interim Retail Manager Role**

Welcome to our branch! Sorry I can't be there to greet you – I've been told by your previous manager that you are a creative thinker and that you'll be a great addition to the team.

It's great to have you on-board. As you know our top priority is to improve branch performance and I hope you will continue to run our monthly Innovation Group meetings – an open forum for any members of the Branch to discuss business improvements.

There are a few other points that I tell all new joiners to remember, regardless of their experience to date:

- We all want to avoid another visit from a representative of the Regulator *FINCOM*. As far as I know our staff always do *Take due care to identify customer needs* exactly as *FINCOM*'s guidelines stipulate.
- We mustn't miss any sales opportunities. We are in an economic downturn so I know it is tough, but we *must* meet our targets.
- We all need to promote our company values. In particular, ensuring that the highest levels of customer service are delivered in all branch operations.
- We must keep business expenses to a minimum – unless of course the expense is in the pursuit of new business opportunities!
- We are a team. As individuals, we all bring a range of different skills to Borough Bank, and I'd like you to focus on building a team and developing the talented graduates working as Sales Executives.

We can catch up once you've settled in – I know that Fred has left you a few items to be getting on with.

Regards,

*Sarah*

Sarah Smith, Branch Manager

### Item 3 – Sales against Target

*Hi Alex,*

*The branch's latest quarterly sales figures are attached. Happy to discuss although I haven't had a chance to analyse these myself yet.*

*Good luck with everything!*

*Vikram*

*Finance Manager*

% of Target	Prestige Customer Team			Prestige Customer Team Target	Regular Customer Team			Regular Customer Team Target
	Penny Hewitt	Shanti Gupta	Simon Brown		Paul Manning	Marie Jones	Jim Dale	
Quarter 4	117.7%	68.4%	121.1%	108%	94.6%	103.6%	75.6%	93%
Quarter 1	123.1%	66.5%	50.4%	85%	96.7%	107.4%	83.2%	98%
Quarter 2	128.8%	62.4%	38.5%	78%	98.4%	105.3%	74.8%	94%
Quarter 3	122.8%	60.2%	-	70%	95.4%	106.9%	81.7%	96%

## Item 4 – Resignation Letter

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Stuart Jeffreys  
HR Manager  
Borough Bank  
High Street  
Sisley  
Surrey

20 May 2010

Dear Stuart

It is with regret that I must tender my resignation. I have enjoyed many aspects of my role as a Sales Executive for Borough Bank's Prestige Team, but sadly my career is not progressing in the way I had hoped it would.

I have accepted a Sales Executive position at M.U.L. Bank, where I am hoping that I will receive more support and career guidance. In my two and a half years at Borough Bank I have only had one formal appraisal and have not been offered the mentoring and training opportunities that were promised when I joined Borough Bank as a graduate. I believe I have a lot of great ideas to offer, and I'm hoping that my new manager will be more open to listening to my ideas - rather than just ordering me around.

I am owed two weeks' holiday, so I am hoping that my last day in the office can be the 3 July.

Yours sincerely,

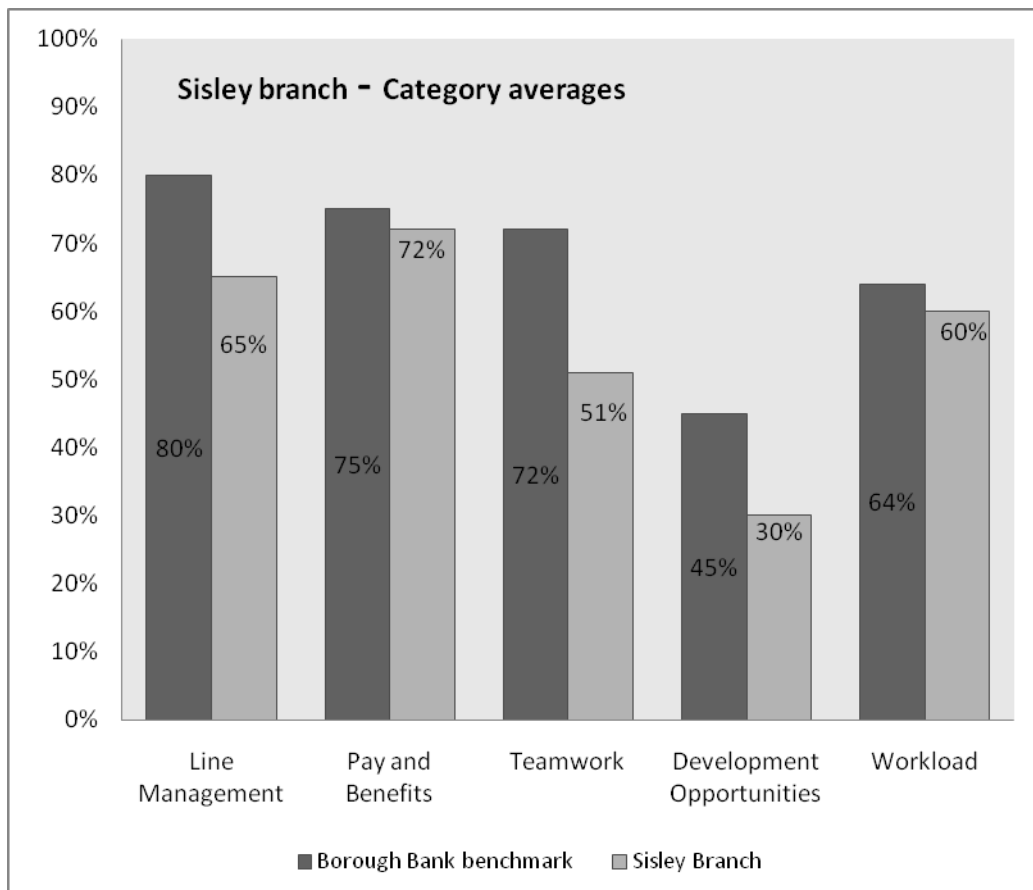
*Simon*

Simon Brown  
Sales Executive, Prestige Team



**Item 5 - Staff Opinion Survey Results – Sisley Branch (excerpts only)**

Qu. No.	Opinion Survey Question (2010 version)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Cannot Tell	Agree	Strongly Agree
5	My manager coaches and supports me	10%	19%	40%	21%	10%
10	I have received all the training I need	16%	45%	15%	15%	9%
29	I have a clear career development plan	13%	36%	30%	18%	3%
57	I always explain the risk associated with any customer investment	18%	47%	18%	10%	7%
85	I fully understand the company values	16%	18%	33%	19%	14%



## Borough Bank

Graduate Scheme  
Our Operations  
Company Values  
What Our Graduates Say about Us

### Graduate Scheme

We like to give our talented graduates the opportunity to work at several of our strategic centres. Graduate trainees experience 3 month placements at a selection of our High Street branches, our larger area offices—as well as spending valuable time experiencing how different functions operate within Head Office. The Graduate Scheme also involves a placement at one of our Customer Sales and Support call centres. This exposure to a broad range of commercial environments builds key business skills.

You'll be working with a series of senior managers throughout. They will support you so that you quickly learn all the valuable skills needed to progress in a competitive banking environment. We pride ourselves on the coaching that is offered by our highly experienced line managers. Also, to help you find your feet you will be assigned a buddy from last year's graduate programme to work alongside.

### Our Operations

A Branch Manager runs the operations of each branch, supported by a series of managers, for example, the Retail Manager who in turn leads two Team Leaders. We employ Customer Support Representatives within each branch to handle day-to-day customer enquiries. Our Sales Executives handle any sales opportunities presented by individual customers.

For such roles it is not necessary to have previous experience of working in financial services. We offer all the necessary training in our range of financial products: mortgages, current accounts, savings accounts, credit cards and business accounts.

### Company Values

So we've attracted some of the most talented graduates in the market, what happens next? We like our graduates to start as they mean to go on so everyone attends Company Values training at an early stage of the programme. You'll be expected to exhibit these Values: *Making Innovation Pay, Putting Customers First, Using Your Initiative, Valuing Customer Feedback, Working as a Team, and Maintaining Our Integrity*. Once you've got our Values Certificate on your wall you're ready to complete the first of our series of compulsory compliance training sessions.

[Home](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Contact Us](#)

### What Our Graduates Say about Us

The best thing about my job is that I work for a large organisation, but the Ilkley branch feels like a small business, in that everyone is so friendly and cooperative. All of the teams go out for drinks together on Friday night, but things do get a bit competitive at our monthly quiz night. Working at branch level really is the best of both worlds!

*Ernest, Ilkley Branch*

My boss, Sarah, has been such a wonderful mentor to me. She's let me prove myself with a number of challenging projects that I initiated, but has always been there for me when I've had problems or questions. She's put me forward for a number of training courses, and even encouraged me to do a rotation at Head Office. Sarah's continuous feedback in our weekly one-to-one meetings has taught me so much - I hope that one day I'll be able to follow in her footsteps.

*Sunil, Nottingham Branch*

Although I'm now working at Head Office, as a graduate trainee I did a number of placements at branches across the country. It was really valuable experience to be meeting customers on a daily basis and equipped me well for my current role in Customer Segmentation. After all, if you don't direct each of your products towards a specific customer segment, you can't fulfill a customer's specific needs.

*David, Head Office - Customer Segmentation Division*

I would describe the environment in my branch as competitive but supportive. Our branch is one of the busiest in the country, and accordingly we have high targets. This could make for a very stressful office environment, but our Retail Manager made sure to really celebrate our successes. We had an Employee of the Month Scheme, and everyone who meets their monthly targets gets a little prize. Working hard isn't a chore if you know you are appreciated.

*Karen, Holborn Branch*

## Item 7 – Team Performance Review

*Please find attached the last Team Performance Review that I have on file. Unfortunately, your predecessor's appraisals were not up-to-date.*

*I thought this might provide some useful background information on your new team. FYI - Simon Brown left the company on 03/07/2010.*

*Stuart Jeffreys*

### **Penny Hewitt, Team Leader**

Penny is the Retail team's star performer, consistently exceeding her personal sales targets. Her previous role at Searly Bank's City of London branch developed her bold and assertive sales approach, and she is certainly doing a great job of finding new Prestige customers for the Sisley Branch. Her technique is resilient and tenacious – she doesn't take no for an answer and will try and sell Prestige products to just about anyone.

Despite Penny's personal excellence, her team's overall results have been disappointing. While the economic situation is certainly a factor, I've told Penny to focus on bringing Shanti and Simon's sales up to her high levels.

### **Simon Brown, Sales Executive**

Simon made a terrific start when he joined us fresh from his graduate training, but his performance – and attitude - has been steadily deteriorating. He is always putting in requests for training opportunities, and seems to need a lot of hand holding. Due to limited resources, his line manager believes that Simon's time should be focussed on driving sales revenue rather than career development.

### **Shanti Gupta, Sales Executive**

Shanti's sales have been disappointing and Penny feels that she is not giving 100% to the role. She is a popular member of the retail team - thanks to her willingness to assist colleagues. However these distractions are affecting her sales performance and I've asked her to give Prestige team sales priority.

Not only is she targeting the wrong sort of customers for Prestige products, she has upset some of our valued Prestige customers by not adopting a suitably deferential approach. I have reminded her that she no longer works for a Regular sales team, as she did on her graduate placement.

### **Paul Manning, Team Leader**

Paul's results are very consistent, as he uses his long-term customer relationships to sell a wide range of Regular Customer products. As with the team's overall performance, his personal performance is slightly below target. He attributes this to the economy and a poor selection of products for Regular customers. Paul also mentioned that the Prestige team had been selling to some of his long-standing customers, thus impacting upon his sales. As the longest serving member of our team, Paul has excellent relationships with colleagues throughout the branch, in particular the Operations Team. He has a lot of knowledge to impart and I've advised him to focus his efforts on bringing Jim Dale up to speed.

### **Jim Dale, Sales Executive**

Jim is the newest member of the Retail team, but that should not be an excuse for underperforming. He is very personable and shows a great willingness to learn and improve. He spends lots of time helping customers with their queries, but is having difficulty closing sales. He will be working closely with Paul to improve his sales technique.

### **Marie Jones, Sales Executive**

Marie has successfully met her sales targets and shows a great deal of promise – she has a bright future ahead of her at Borough Bank. She has closed a number of quite difficult mortgage sales, many being customers that Jim initially dealt with. She is very driven and did ask about updating her career development plan, but I've suggested that she focus on maximizing sales for the team – something she is already very good at.

## Item 8 – Customer Complaint Letter 1

Mrs Elaine Franklin  
Lilac Cottage  
Park Lane  
Sisley  
Surrey

Retail Manager  
Borough Bank  
High Street  
Sisley  
Surrey

15 September 2010

Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing with regard to a personal loan of £10,000 that I borrowed from Borough Bank in October of last year in order to make improvements to my home. I recently paid off the balance of this loan, only to be told that there was an early redemption penalty. This penalty was not highlighted to me when I purchased the loan. Additionally, your very persuasive Sales Executive, Marie Jones, sold me insurance to protect my loan repayments. I was led to believe this was compulsory – only to recently discover that it was not only unnecessary, but also adding an additional 3% to my repayments!

I have been a customer of Borough Bank for the past three decades, but as I no longer feel that your organisation has my best interests at heart I'm considering taking my banking custom elsewhere. I will also be contacting FINCOM regarding this matter if I do not hear from you shortly.

Sincerely,

*E. Franklin*

Elaine Franklin

## Item 9 – Email chain 1

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From: vikram.patel@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: mohammed.khan@boroughbank.co.uk  
CC: sarah.smith@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 26<sup>th</sup> October 14:06

Subject: Window display

I agree that the posters and leaflets look terrific – but I just wondered about the logic behind the multiple displays. Unemployment in Sisley has risen to 10% and our branch is seeing a record number of house repossessions. Have we really thought through how this is going to drive new sales revenue? The Prestige Gold account has an annual fee, not to mention a rather steep qualifying balance.

Regards,  
Vikram

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From: mohammed.khan@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: vikram.patel@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 26<sup>th</sup> October 13:11

Subject: Window display

The leaflets and posters are supplied from Head Office, but it is up to each branch to decide how to use them. Penny Hewitt was very keen to promote the new Prestige Gold account, which is why I put those posters in our windows. What, in particular, is your concern, Vik? I think they look great and surely it is worth publicizing the Prestige Gold account's benefits?

Regards,  
Mohammed

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From: vikram.patel@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: mohammed.khan@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 26<sup>th</sup> October 12:13

Subject: Window display

Not sure if I should be addressing this to you, or if I should wait for the Interim Retail Manager to start, but I was wondering why so much of the lobby and window display is taken up with literature promoting Prestige accounts?

Regards,  
Vikram

# BOROUGH BANKING SERVICES

## INNOVATION GROUP MEETING

Date: 10 October 2010, 14:00-15:30  
Meeting Held in Meeting Room II

Those present:

1. Paul Manning, Regular Customer Team Leader
2. Vikram Patel, F.M.(Chair in absence of Retail Branch Manager)
3. Fred Lopez, Assistant

Apologies received from Penny Hewitt, Marie Jones, Jim Dale, Shanti Gupta

The following issues arose:

1. Customer feedback

There continue to be complaints from Prestige customers. In the absence of the Team Leader it was difficult to resolve these at the meeting.

*Next Actions: As a Retail Manager responsibility this issue was deferred until the next meeting.*

2. Product development

Paul reported back from his meeting with the Product Development team at Head Office. He outlined some new mortgage and savings products for Regular customers launching next quarter.

Paul also highlighted some ways to differentiate our products from competitor banks. Paul was referred to the Marketing Dept. on this point.

*Next Actions: No actions to take*

3. Ideas for branch sales improvement

Paul wanted to discuss how best to progress his many sales initiative ideas, including

- Identifying more cross-selling opportunities
- Having personal bankers assigned to each Prestige customer



- Networking opportunities e.g. the local Chamber of Commerce, a local Professionals Forum meeting twice a month in the Town Hall, an online group of banking professionals

*Next Actions: Vikram asked for a breakdown of the cost associated with each of these ideas.*

#### 4. Competitor review

The following points were made in discussion:

- Vikram reported that competitor bank *O.E.K.* had started to advertise on TV its new services for non-premium customers.
- Paul agreed that more and more of his customers were mentioning *O.E.K.*
- Paul commented that the Borough Bank range of products was almost identical to the products sold by *W&W Banking Services*.

*Next Actions: Paul agreed to review other competitor Websites to see if their marketing had started to target lower income groups.*

#### 5. Vacant Sales Account Executive position

Paul asked for an update on the vacant Sales Executive position (Prestige Customer Team). Vikram advised that revisions were being made to the proposed recruitment campaign in order to save costs, just needed final sign-off from Sarah.

*Next Actions: Vikram to discuss with Stuart Jeffreys.*

#### 6. Any other business

Date of next meeting to be set by Interim Retail Manager.

## Item 11 – Email chain 2

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From: penny.hewitt@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: paul.manning@boroughbank.co.uk  
cc: sarah.smith@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 7<sup>th</sup> October 11:03

Subject: Borough Bank's Procedures Manual

I'm afraid that I don't have a copy of the manual that you are referring to. And as to training, I'm not sure when I'm supposed to find time for that - in case you haven't noticed, I am down a member of staff until we've recruited a new Sales Executive!

While I appreciate the branch was busy on Saturday, as Prestige Team Leader my priority is generating revenue for my team. As a manager, my time is not best spent doing basic queue management, and managers were certainly not expected to do this when I worked for Searly Bank. You should take this up with the Customer Support Team - not me. I don't need one of your graduates telling me how to do my job.

Penny

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From: paul.manning@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: penny.hewitt@boroughbank.co.uk  
CC: sarah.smith@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 7<sup>th</sup> October 10:11

Subject: Borough Bank's Procedures Manual

I'm a bit concerned because my team has told me that they aren't getting much support from the Prestige team when the branch is particularly busy. We are ALL under pressure to meet our targets, but Borough Bank's Procedures Manual clearly states that customer service has to be our first priority.

We also need to be careful about selling too aggressively - we don't want to run afoul of FINCOM regulations. I'm not convinced that each member of staff is compliance trained to the necessary level.

Paul

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From: jim.dale@boroughbank.co.uk  
To: penny.hewitt@boroughbank.co.uk  
CC: sarah.smith@boroughbank.co.uk  
Date: 7<sup>th</sup> October 09:32

Subject: Prestige Gold account

On Saturday we were really busy - the queue was out of the door by 11am. While Marie and I did our best to keep the queue moving (helping customers pay in cheques, etc) - it was really frustrating that nobody from the Prestige team was helping. Instead of serving frustrated customers, Shanti was trying to sell everyone that came in the new Prestige Gold account.

Jim

## Item 12 – Training Workshop Email

### CORPORATE HR MEMO

**TO: All managers**

**DATE: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010**

Please send booking requests for these workshops to [training@boroughbank.co.uk](mailto:training@boroughbank.co.uk).

**Places guaranteed if bookings are made within the next 2 weeks.**

<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>
Written Communication Skills	Non-graduates
Coaching Your Colleagues to Success	Any Manager
Making Difficult Customer Relationships Work	Retail Banking staff
Making Mentoring Work	All staff
Compliance Sales Training Accreditation Level 1*	Graduate Trainees (compulsory)
Advanced Compliance Sales Training Accreditation Level 2*	Sales Executives (compulsory)
Technical Compliance Training Accreditation Level 3*	Team Leaders (compulsory)
Talking to Customers With Confidence	Retail Banking staff
Best Practice in Project Management	All staff
Understand All That Your Customer Needs	Retail Banking staff
Managing Staff – The Borough Bank Way	Any Manager

\* Given sufficient numbers Head Office training courses may be run at branches by Area Compliance Officer

Notes:

- 1) Training course dates available upon request.
- 2) Professional qualification training information also available (including FINCOM's training exams, accountancy qualifications).

## BOROUGH BANKING SERVICES

Circulation list:

Sarah Smith  
Stuart Jeffreys  
Vikram Patel  
Mohammed Khan  
Interim Retail Manager

Please see below a compilation of customer comments received in Quarter 3.

*Why are the cash points always broken????? It is so annoying. Almost as annoying as the TV adverts you always show in your branch.*

Mr Ray Johnson

*I am a first time buyer and I found the sales executive I spoke to very confusing. She kept trying to sell me a premium mortgage, when I am a newly qualified teacher on a low salary.*

Miss Chloe Hawkins

*I tried to contact this branch by phone and found it impossible - your company website does not list branch telephone numbers, and all my calls went through to a call centre. I wanted to speak to someone at the Sisley Branch about arranging a meeting and had to come in instead. Even then there was nobody manning your Enquiries desk, despite sales personnel being clearly available.*

Mrs G Baker

*Why do you try to sell me a credit card every time I come into branch? As I have explained numerous times I do NOT want a Prestige Gold Card, so please do not ask me every single time I come pay in a cheque.*

Tina Sousa

*I am a student who has exceeded my overdraft and had the unpleasant surprise of a penalty fee. While the free cinema vouchers I got when I opened the account were great - someone could have explained to me what would happen if I went overdrawn. Thanks.*

Jake Eaton

*I want to say thank you to Shanti Gupta, who helped me use the cash machine when I had forgotten my spectacles.*

Mrs Elsie Kennedy

*I wanted to open a Silver Savings Bond, which I saw advertised in your branch. To my disappointment, the interest rates were no longer available - why were you still promoting them?*

Frank Williams

*As a Prestige customer, I should not be queuing for 35 minutes in order to transfer funds between my accounts. I pay a premium for my account and deserve better service than this!*

Archibald de Winter III

Item No.	Key Issues and Recommended Actions	Priority (high, medium or low)
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**End of practice in-tray exercise**

Download the answers and candidate guidance here:  
<http://www.assessmentday.co.uk/in-tray-exercise.htm>