

Who are you and what is your role?

- Rob Miller – Customer Service Assistant/Step-up Team Manager

Apprenticeship Title?

- Retail Team Leader Level 3

What one skill do you use now that you didn't before your apprenticeship?

This would be delegation. I had never managed anyone directly up until I started the apprenticeship. I was very nervous about asking colleagues to do a task. I was always used to following instructions not the one to give them. Fortunately, the apprenticeship and training covered this area in detail. I spent a lot of time looking at Leadership and the aspects of it. How to get the best out of people by using their strengths, how to interact with colleagues in both good and bad situations, and how to deal with conflict. This is an area I imagine no one wants to deal in, but it is vitally important to learn as sometimes under stress or pressure of the situation things can be said and done that need to be addressed in the right way to make sure they are not on-going. The apprenticeship taught me all of this, by way of exercises on paper, in group role play, via Teams online, by use of video training and by making you think about "what would you do in that situation?" And, "what you shouldn't do!"

I learned to say, "could you do this?" Not, "you will do this". How to listen to ideas, to check in to see how the task is going and how to let go when needed. A good leader delegates, listens, learns, observes, wants to improve themselves and their team and learns quickly that the daily tasks cannot be done by one person. It's called 'TEAM' Manager for a reason.

The apprenticeship gave me the confidence in myself to say you can lead, you don't know everything, and every day is a new challenge. Learning never stops and I wouldn't want to.

What have you learnt about yourself whilst on the apprenticeship?

That I could be a manager and that there are plenty of techniques to learn, processes to follow, people willing to help you and that you can unlock skills that you didn't know that you had!

I learnt how to use my time effectively. More importantly that it was ok to ask for help, that I could see this through to the end, even when my Mental Health took a massive hit. Help and support was available through the apprenticeship, the training provider and especially from my mentor. A break in learning is ok to do. Take some time out, re-set and go ahead when ready, the apprenticeship effectively pauses so there is no pressure about being left behind. It's not a statement of weakness, it takes more courage to say, "I need help". I learned to talk to people about what I was finding difficult, what was holding me back and how solutions could be found that helped me and the people around me. Taking on the apprenticeship is a big commitment and it is a lot of work, but the positive outcomes far exceed the negative ones by far.

The apprenticeship is a journey that I am glad that I have taken. I didn't ever think that I could or would be a manager of a team. The apprenticeship has provided me with all the skills needed and much, much more to prove to myself that I could do it.

What have you found to be the most beneficial aspect of your apprenticeship?

The mentorship part was crucial to me. Having an appointed mentor I could refer too, discuss progress, bounce ideas off and have someone looking out for me, gave me the confidence I needed especially when things got difficult.

Being a mentor is a special job and it can literally impact someone positively for the rest of their lives. It's often said you never forget a good teacher; a mentor is the same. A great mentor doesn't do the work for you, give you the answers, but they will not let you struggle. They will guide you, let you make mistakes so you learn, they will let you grow as you go through the apprenticeship.

My mentor (Elaine Payne) supported me through tough times when I had to take a learning break for 9 months due to my mental health & well-being; you pick up where you left off, when the time is right to continue. Had it not been for Elaine I would have left the apprenticeship. Elaine knew I could finish the apprenticeship and continually encouraged me not to give up. We helped each other as a Mentor/Mentee relationship is a two-way thing. It's not always about work, you learn lots of life skills, I certainly did!

My advice would be: Find a mentor willing to take that journey with you. Elaine and I stay in contact regularly and will continue to, especially after our journey together with lots of ups and downs along the way. I gained a qualification and a very special bond with someone who has taught me so much. I am very grateful that Elaine has agreed to be my forever on-going Mentor, I am a better overall person as a direct result of Elaine's mentorship. That is the effect a mentor can have.