

A Day In The Life Of Field Engineer

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How many sales does a salesman make in one week? What exactly does a field engineer do? How does a Systemedia clerk spend her day? What is the real role of an office administrator? NCR is made up of individuals in various fields, each playing a crucial part in the success of the company, yet few people know what is the true nature of jobs outside their particular area. In this, the first of a series of articles, 'Post' describes a day in the life of an FED centre manager.

A warm, sunny early spring morning, following a harder than average Glasgow winter, put Scott Caldow in good spirits which the early morning barrage of phone calls did not dampen.

Getting to his office at 8.15, Scott spent the next 45 minutes phoning and receiving calls from most of the 40 or so engineers in his area which covers over 1,100 square miles. Many of these calls were also handled by Scott's right hand man, district field engineer Mike Martin.

Among the vital messages flowing between engineers on territory and the Glasgow office was an urgent request from the Aberdeen depot wanting two kits sent out to enable engineers there to repair some accounting machines, a call from an engineer in Ayrshire wanting advice on how best to estimate the cost of overhauling all the cash registers in the Butlin's holiday camps on the Ayrshire coast, and a call from an engineer in Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre who wanted to know which job he should do next.

Such calls were, Scott reported, about average. "One thing that we must always remember is that we are here to serve the engineers on territory rather than they serve us. They have the problems, and I've got to help them solve them."

Advice

As soon as there was a pause in the calls, engineers who had come into the Glasgow office to repair the numerous cash registers that had collected there over the past two weeks, asked Scott for advice. One particular problem concerned an optical font which had been giving engineer David Mackintosh a lot of trouble. Scott willingly gave his advice on this and other problems.

The next thing Scott did, as he does every day, was to make sure that all the parts that the office had telexed Head Office for had arrived at Glasgow Central Station. Once he confirmed this, he knew that other members of his team would put them on the necessary buses trains and vans to reach the engineers that wanted them.

At this stage in his day, sometime after 10.00, Scott dealt with the correspondence that the morning post had brought. This was relatively straight-

forward — enquiries were answered and engineers were detailed to visit sites where machines were giving trouble.

Scott then visited Alec Watt, a computer engineer responsible for organising engineer calls for computer breakdowns. This meant that he had to decide which were the most urgent calls and then get engineers there as fast as possible. Alec described the system he had organised which enabled anyone in the office to locate a computer part that could then be sent to an engineer.

Administration

On his way back to his office Scott joked with the three girls that give FED in Glasgow such fine service: Christine Hamilton, Marjorie Anderson and Linda Nicol. In his office Scott explained that the girls were part of the office administration, yet performed all the vital secretarial back-up duties for FED.

They think of themselves very much a part of the FED operation,” Scott explained, and they are not only very loyal to us but play an exceptionally valuable part in our day-to-day organization. And, as if to confirm this, Linda brought in the coffee and reminded Scott that he had to phone London about the sickness pay of one of his engineers. Scott duly made the call and sorted out the matter to his satisfaction.

Then, after seeing how progress was going on the cash registers in the office workshop, he made a call to arrange a visit to the computer rooms at the Clydesdale Bank. The bank is the largest NCR computer installation in Scotland and because of illness and jury service, there was a shortage of engineers to deal with the many problems that inevitably beset these machines. Area supervisor Jim McLaren, who has what he describes as a watching brief over the bank’s computers, confirmed the visit immediately after lunch.

Scott and Mike Martin have made a habit of going for an early lunch. At 11.45 they headed for the restaurant in Glasgow’s large Cooperative complex.

We made a rule to have a complete mid-day break during decimalization,’ Scott emphasized. At that time there was so much work to do that we all nearly went insane. Even now, I have enough work to keep me busy 24 hours, seven days a week, and still not get it done. But no matter how much there is to do. Mike and I take a lunch break away from the office; otherwise we would answer the phone all day long.

Challenge

During lunch, Scott and Mike discussed morale inside FED in Glasgow. It was their firm belief that engineers were looking forward to working on more computers, especially as their training had, for some time now, prepared them for computer work. Glasgow FED. Mike said, felt computers offered a refreshing challenge.

Scott thought that FED changed to meet the prevailing circumstances. At the moment we are still in a period of change. Much of the work is still on cash registers. though our engineers are trained to handle computers. Thus, as soon as we begin to sell computers in volume we will have the engineers ready to cope with them. It's the sales we are lacking — NCR should have far greater sales penetration.”

Lunch over, and the weather still fine, Scott and Mike took a short stroll in an open area of the city, as they always do, weather permitting, “to blow the cobwebs away,” Mike laughed.

Returning to his office Scott found the second post awaiting him, and quickly sorted through it. One letter caused him to frown: it was an estimate for the repair of an engineer's car. The engineer had crashed on the way to a training course in Dundee, and the estimate was for well over £100. “This means that I'll have to get this approved by the insurance office in London, and they will want a second estimate, which will take more time No doubt they think they could save money, but we always deal with this garage as they are reasonable and do a good job.”

Just as he as about to leave for the bank, Mike Martin brought him a telex that said certain parts ordered from London had been delayed. “Well,” Scott smiled wryly ‘I suppose we'll have to do the impossible and get that part from somewhere,” a task he put in the willing hands of Mike Martin.

Service

Scott and Jim McLaren then drove to the Clydesdale Bank, and after going through the rigorous security procedures, were let into the bank's offices. Accompanied by bank officials, they first looked into a large room where row upon row of NCR 482 encoders were working non-stop. One machine was being repaired by engineers Alan Pearce and Barry Josephson who are permanently in the bank servicing the encoders. Scott and Jim talked to them before going up a floor to the computer room. Here they were accompanied by Neil Gray, the bank's computer centre manager.

The NCR engineers and the bank obviously have a good working relationship. On this occasion, Scott, Jim and Neil discussed with engineers Hamish McKenzie and Fred Docherty the best way to resolve a maintenance problem concerning the NCR Century 200.

This done, Scott and Jim returned to the Glasgow office. “The Clydesdale Bank is very important to us. A team of engineers are based there, and Jim oversees the whole operation,” Scott explained. Nevertheless, with a number of engineers off work, he wanted to make sure that Jim would have enough men there to properly service the bank's NCR equipment

Back in the office, a little after 3.00, a phone call posed another problem for Scott. A customer's NCR 299 accounting system had broken down, and it was

the firm's payroll day. Scott's main headache was that the engineer on this territory had been diverted to another territory because the engineer there was also diverted to cover a colleague attending a training course in Dundee. Taking the decision at once, Scott sent out David Mackintosh who was still repairing cash registers in the workshop.

This sorted out, Scott allowed himself the luxury of a cup of coffee, his third of the day. To add to his contentment, Marjorie Anderson brought him the news that the insurance office in London had approved a quote on another damaged car.

Examination

Mike Martin then took the opportunity to discuss a problem which personnel had brought up about a former engineer.

As soon as their conversation had ended, Scott phoned John Mill, Centre Manager at Edinburgh to clear up a problem about engineers' car allocations. This resolved, Scott called London to discuss how much money an engineer who had just left NCR should be paid.

During this call, Linda put an engineer's time sheet on his desk. After giving it a brief but close examination, Scott initialed it. "This information goes to London, and from it the customer is invoiced and the engineer paid," Scott explained.

Satisfied

The time sheet initialed, he then began phoning around his area to see what parts were needed and allocate jobs for the engineers to do the following day. Such monitoring not only gave him an overview of work being done, he explained, it also allowed him to prepare the following day's work.

Just before 5.30, with Glasgow office rapidly becoming deserted except for a few members of the FED team, Scott's phone rang. He was dreading this call, for if a customer rang at about this time with a breakdown, it invariably meant he had to stay late to organize an engineer and the necessary parts. Finally, he picked up the phone — and then smiled. It was the Aberdeen depot, thanking the office for the dispatch of the two kits earlier in the day. They had arrived and had enabled the machines to be repaired. "Satisfied customers, satisfied engineers, and I even get thanked," Scott beamed, "That is unusual!" The crisis period over, and no urgent customer calls to deal with, Scott, looking tired, decided to go home. Not deceived by the last of the sunlight, he put on his hat and overcoat before slowly leaving the building.

It had, he said, been an easy day.