

UK/USA EPSRC Project – Digital Economy – Requirements Gathering

Characters

Alec – Iain Wotherspoon

Betty – Sheena Penson

Luis – Paul Harper Swan

Scenario 1

HomeWorks, a large do-it-yourself building and decorating chain of stores are interviewing today for tele-workers to run their help-desk

In performing space, 3-4 chairs on one side, with Betty sitting on one of them. A table and chair (for interviewer) on other side.

Pause while we take in scene.

Enter Alec.

ALEC This where they're interviewing for tele-workers?

BETTY That's right.

Alec sits

ALEC Thought I was late.

BETTY No, you're in good time.

ALEX Don't want to make a bad first impression.

pause

BETTY You retired?

ALEC Yes. Didn't really want to retire. But it was getting too much for me – I was in the building trade. Getting older and a touch of arthritis.

BETTY So you want something a bit less physical? Like this telephone help line thing?

ALEC I guess so. Not sure what it will involve. They probably don't want anyone my age.

BETTY Well, I hope so! We're much the same age!

ALEC Thought you were younger than me!

BETTY What a flatterer! But seriously, I think employing older people might suit them. It's only part-time, isn't it? Young folk, people with families, will be looking for full time.

ALEC I suppose so. Part-time will suit me just fine. I need the money but my Dad is 92 and needs a lot of attention. He's pretty frail. You can work from home in this job, can't you?

BETTY I think so. I think they'll give you a computer for working at home.

ALEC Computer? I've never used a computer. I thought help line meant speaking to people on the phone!

BETTY I suppose it might sometimes, but I think a lot of it is on-line.

ALEC Really? Then there's not much point me staying here. Never used a computer in my life!

Alec rises

BETTY Hey, hold on! They said everyone would get training!

ALEC Yeah but I'd be starting from nothing! You've probably done lots of stuff on computers

BETTY Only a bit. I was clerical, so I've done some word processing – and I use email. But not much else. I'll have a lot to learn. And I don't know much about building!

Alec hesitates

ALEC Oh, I don't know. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

BETTY If you want a job you'll have to learn one or two new tricks, won't you?

ALEC I just don't feel confident.....

BETTY Look, neither do I! I'm only doing this because I'm on my own, I'm bored and I need to get out and speak to more people.

I'm just keeping my fingers crossed I'll cope with the training.

ALEC I don't know.....

Enter Interviewer, Luis Carreno. He walks across space to table, nodding at A & B. He settles down and opens papers.

BETTY Go on! Give it a go!

ALEC Now I've got here...nothing to lose...

Alec sits

ALEC You're on your own as well?

BETTY Yes. I retired early eight years ago to nurse my husband till he passed away..

ALEC I'm sorry. You looked after him at home?

BETTY Til the last few months. It was pretty tough; our children and grandchildren live a long way away.
But I'd do it again.

So this is me, going back to work after all that time. Scary, eh?

LC moves from the table.

LUIS Mr Alec Moray?

ALEC *(rising)* That's me.

LC shakes hands

LUIS I'm Luis Carreno, Manager of the help line. Pleased to meet you, Mr Moray. Can I call you Alec?

ALEC Sure.

LUIS Come and take a seat.

They move into 'interview room', Alec sits, while LC sits opposite.

LUIS Now then, Alec, how clear are you about what this job entails?

ALEC I assumed it was answering people's enquiries about building projects or decorating jobs they are doing at home.

LUIS That's basically what you'd be doing/-

ALEC -/But it would mean using a computer?

LUIS The greater part of the job would be on-line, yes/-

ALEC -/ In that case, I'm wasting your time. I have never used a computer. Never needed to, never learned.

LUIS We do offer training.
But it sounds as if you might be reluctant to train to use a computer?

Brief Pause

*Some comment from the audience on their reaction to Alec's interview technique;
comments on negative aspects of both candidates;
Advice for Alec on how to present himself differently.*

CONTINUE.....

- LUIS We do offer training. But it sounds as if you might be reluctant to train to use a computer?
- ALEC No, sorry, I didn't mean to give that impression. I've had a lot of practical experience in the area of building and decorating – but I've never used a computer.
Would you be prepared to train someone like me, who'd never used one?
- LUIS It's possible. But let's see what experience you've had.

Now, how would you respond to a customer who asked you this question?

“I want to point my patio. Which type of sand do I use? And what's the ratio of cement mix?”
- ALEC That's pretty straightforward. He needs to use Builder's sand, not sharp sand. And the ratio is 5 parts of sand to 1 of cement.
- LUIS OK. Here's another.

“A customer has a newly plastered wall he – or she!- wants to redecorate. How would you advise the customer to prepare it for decorating?”
- ALEC I'd need to know whether they wanted to paint it or wallpaper it.
- LUIS Yes..?
- ALEC If they're going to wallpaper, they need to seal with 'wall size' first, then put on the paper.

To paint the wall.....There's two options.

You can either prepare the wall with PVA sealer – but water it down. But, if you do this the plaster has to be completely dried out.

If you're not sure about that you can water down the first coat of emulsion; that still allows the plaster to breathe.
- LUIS And can the customer get all this in our stores?
- ALEC There's not much the customer *cannot* get in your stores!
- LUIS So you're pretty familiar with our stores?

ALEC You could say that!

LUIS Now the, Alec, let's get back to the question of using a computer.
Most of our customers come on-line with their enquiries.
And also, if you're not sure of any information, both our directory and our
stock lists are found on-line.

ALEC I see.

LUIS So, let me ask you again, how would you feel about going to computer
classes?

ALEC I suppose I'm willing to try.....but I'd be nervous I wouldn't keep up with
everyone else.
I'd be slow.

LUIS OK. Alec. Thank you for coming today. Obviously we have a number of
people to see, so we'll be in touch.

ALEC Thank you

*Alec and Luis rise, shake hands etc
Alec passes out into the waiting area, while Luis makes notes.*

BETTY How'd you get on?

ALEC Not sure. He seems OK. Good luck!

Exit Alec.

LC reassembles notes and rises to go to meet Betty.

LUIS Mrs Betty North?

Betty rises, they shake hands etc

LUIS I'm Luis Carreno. I'm manager of the help line.
 Come in and take a seat.

They are seated.

LUIS Now then, Mrs North. May I call you Betty?

BETTY That's fine.

LUIS I see you haven't had a job for eight years.

BETTY That's right. I took early retirement from my previous job to look after my husband. He had Parkinson's. He passed away last year.

LUIS I'm sorry to hear that.
 But you now want to get back into work?

BETTY That's right. My pension is quite small, so extra money would be useful.
 But I also need to get out and be with other people.
 I really missed working with other people.

LUIS This help line work can be done from your home. Sounds as if you might not want that? You'd prefer to work in an office?

BETTY A lot of the time home would be fine. I'd be talking to the customers and sorting stuff out for them.

LUIS And how familiar are you with our stores?

BETTY I've bought paint, and wallpaper – that sort of stuff. I do my own decorating.

LUIS Gardening?

BETTY I used to have a garden. I live in a small apartment now.

LUIS Plumbing, tiling, building patios or walls – have you done any of this?

BETTY No.

LUIS What about electrical goods?

BETTY Well, I've bought a vacuum cleaner here. And a toaster.

LUIS Uhuh.

Now, I see you already have some computer skills.

BETTY I used to do a bit word processing in my previous job – the odd letter. I use the Net sometimes and use email.

LUIS You've not used spread sheets or databases?

BETTY No.

LUIS Of course, we would be offering any future employees training. There'll be quite a few people having to brush up on their skills.

And you'd need spread sheets and data bases to find information you didn't already have.

As you know, our stores cover a huge range of different types of goods

PAUSE

Thinks bubbles for Luis and Betty

How does audience think Betty is doing?

Would they give Alec or Betty a job?

If they were Luis, what questions would they like to ask, especially about computer skills?

At this point audience can be given the chance to 'Hot seat' Alec, Betty and Luis – ask the characters questions, give them advice and make comments.

Actors will be briefed as to their cvs, life experience, state of computer skills and experience of and attitudes to training.

CHARACTERS' BACKGROUND – this can be added to in rehearsal

Betty is apprehensive about any future training. Some years ago, in her last job, she was sent to a class to learn word processing. She found the instructor went too fast and used language/jargon she did not understand.

She had felt very stupid not knowing things the younger participants seemed to know; she felt embarrassed having to ask what a 'mouse' was.

She had spent time in the office working things out with the manual and asking a friend and colleague when she was stuck. She found this much less intimidating.

Betty does have people skills. She was a clerk in an energy company's office and whenever a difficult query or a complaining customer came on the line, the younger ones tried to get her to deal with it. She has lost some confidence being out of the workplace for eight years and has some problems with her hearing.

Alec is secretly appalled at the thought of looking stupid, he does not know whether he will be able to learn how to work a computer at his age.

He is happy looking things up in directories or manuals and up to now has been a little scornful about computers. But he wants this job.

He has a mobile phone, which he has used for some time. He uses the text facility but needs a pencil to work the keys because of stiff hands and needs his glasses to read any text message or instruction.