

Reading

You are going to read an extract from an article about receptionists. For questions 24-30, choose the answer A, B, C, or D you think fits best according to the text.

Smile please

While you are reading this I would like you to smile. And why am I asking you to force a smile while you are in the office or on the train, or while pouring out your cornflakes? Because I would like you to understand what it is like to be a receptionist. I would like you to have some idea of how it feels to smile continually for most of the day.

But beneath this happy exterior, the life of the receptionist is supposedly a miserable affair. It is like a famous actress hiding her tragedy behind a glittering showbiz persona. For receptionists are bored, isolated and, to be honest, want a little respect. Or so says a survey conducted by recruitment consultants Maine-Tucker. A third of surveyed receptionists complained that they were bored with their job. One hesitates to point out that being bored in your job is rather par for the course. It is like going to school and hating the double maths lessons even if you are the maths teacher. That said, of course, the receptionist has the responsibility of not looking bored at all. All yawns must be hidden. The receptionist simply does not have the luxury of being able to put her head in her hands, and swear loudly in the middle of the afternoon.

One fifth claimed that they felt cut off from the rest of the company, especially those working in larger organizations. All they get is a touch of the hat and a brief hello as the rest of the company walks past first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. There is no chatting about last night's excitement.

The receptionist is often viewed as the face of a company. She or he is more than likely the first person visitors will meet when they enter the building. Therefore the receptionist has to look smartly turned out. There can't be any spilled food on your blouse or spinach stuck between your teeth. Some large firms even give their receptionists a clothing allowance to ensure that they always look presentable. Most importantly, the receptionist has to appear approachable. It is the absolute opposite of the snobbish reception you get in designer clothing stores. This is where the smiling comes in. A genuine open-lipped smile suggests warmth and openness. But being a receptionist is not merely about answering telephones and calling up to the fourth floor to say 'Mr Jones, Mr Garfunkel is in reception'. It is often about dealing with customers or clients who are upset, or annoyed, or downright livid. The receptionist might have to listen to a visitor's dissatisfaction with the company as a whole, or about having to wait to speak to somebody in the firm, or even that he missed his train to work this morning and had to pay for a cab. Some customers may be violent or threatening. Indeed the Maine-Tucker report found that 28% of those surveyed wanted to be treated with more respect by both staff and visitors.

At a time when the role of secretary is viewed as increasingly important, where a business can not work without someone who understands the technology and all the detail of running the office, receptionists are feeling particularly overlooked. The potential for promotion from a secretarial position is ever more likely. But for a receptionist to go quickly up the career ladder is a much more difficult task.

It is in smaller companies, especially in start-ups, that receptionists feel their role is more valued. In such organizations everyone, whatever their job, gets to contribute to a project. In this way, receptionists may get the chance to show that they have skills beyond the front desk, and are eligible for promotion. Now that is a reason for smiling.