Participant Two – 6 June 2019

DT: Can you confirm that you are happy for me or you to record the conversation

P5: Er yes

DT: Wonderful, well thank you for agreeing to umm talk to me today. Can I start off going back a year or so and tell me a little bit about your placement search and the process that took you to your company?

P5: Yes basically, I (pause) I got my placement in March and basically I was applying for placements and it wasn’t going particularly well so I took a slightly different approach and I approached the company and I a few companies and umm I had done loads and had heard back from my company in about an hour and I basically gave a presentation on what I wanted to give and what I wanted to do for the company and umm yes it went really well and I was offered a placement and yeah err, I think I was quite fortunate, I think a lot of people I know have been through far tougher processes, but yeah it was good.

DT: Well it sounds very proactive of you. So were you aware of the company already or did you almost look online at companies and write to everybody?

P5: No, what I looked at was project management as obviously that’s was my second year choice and the company I work for have got project management type projects in their name so they came up in the list in Google and I have family members who work in the same sector, so I spoke to them on (pause) how to approach it, how I went towards it and yeah a complete approach, blank canvas and yeah.

DT: That’s a good story for a successful way to apply which is sort of out of the norm a bit

P5: Yeah it’s different as I felt that going through the application process is especially for these big companies you’re are just a name on a piece of paper and I found especially when you approach someone it’s a little more personal especially the fact we are only a small company there are only twelve of us employed in the office and err we heavily rely on sub contractors so there is continuous work.

DT: Good. So tell me about your first week with the company, umm so what sort of induction did you have?

P5: Ahh well, I started my placement on 16 July 2018 and for the first two-three weeks I was just shadowing the MD, the Managing Director of the company he is, his main role is essentially as a project manager, but he does a lot of umm meeting clients, so I was literally next to him, shadowing him, learnt how he conducts himself, the sort of habits that he has that umm I try and learn and that’s what I said to him, it would just be brilliant that any conversation with anyone if I could just eavesdrop and yeah try to learn from him. My induction was umm to be honest I think it was very informal, but we wouldn’t mind saying that we are a very laid back company, we’re umm easy going but obviously at the same time you have to learn the hard way as obviously otherwise it defeats the point. Yeah so I didn’t really have too many, I got a starter pack and a few forms to sign, consent forms and also umm a document basically said that I wasn’t allowed to work for any company within 10 miles, umm that sort of thing, pretty standard, but yeah it was more personal, spoke to a lot of different people around the company, what they done, what was their experience. But yeah it wasn’t so much of a process just gradually, just gradually learnt more and more.

DT: It sounds like a fantastic opportunity as often people during their first couple of weeks they don’t get to meet senior people so (P5: yeah), umm it sounds like a great opportunity for you. So what umm were your initial thoughts about the job role and the company?

P5: Yeah sure, so umm is it alright if I give you a bit of background on what we do? (DT:yes) So we are shop fitters essentially so we refurbish predominately restaurants a few retail shops as well, but our main trade is restaurants. Obviously we work with designers, architects to umm create the clients vision and how we go about that. I would say we class ourselves in the premium sector as we are quite expensive, umm, so yeah the company is 10 years old and last year we just done ten million pound turnover which is great achievement for us and we now in the last two months sent up a joinery company, so that we can do joinery inhouse. So yeah its really exciting times, really looking forward to coming back here, as I said I have been given an opportunity to come back as a full project manager once when I graduate so its really fantastic (DT: yeh) and yeah so going through to the original question sorry which was howed I find it was it?

DT: yes so umm what were your initial thoughts about the job role and organisation?

P5: Ok, sorry yes, so my job role is a project assistant which essentially I report to my MD and he does the large restaurants so he does umm so one we are working on xxxx in Mayfair and I do a lot of the admin work. So there are a lot of processes, umm theres a lot of people, lot of teams obviously as you can imagine xxxx has an army of people and to put that into context the first restaurant we worked in was when I first started which was a 20 week fit out in this really nice seafood restaurant in Brentwood so it was a very nice starter where it wasn’t strict there is not so many people, everyone understand there was on placement and they helped me and I went through the same process as what I do now, but not as strict. Urr so to start off with I would get basically a list of things to complete on a weekly basis and I would go to him on a Monday and a Friday and say I’ve done this or I need help with this then I would go away again and complete the other bits. And yeah I don’t really have anything to compare it to, but I enjoy working like that and it gave me a lot of time to think to myself and learn and again everyone here in the company has given me as much time as they could and I couldn’t ask for better people around me.

DT: Ahh, that’s fantastic, such a good experience

P5: yeah

DT: So how do you think your job role has changed since you first started it?

P5: Yeah, so it’s changed a lot. Umm as I said I was predominately, uhh (pause) so I would describe myself as a PA to the Project Manager when I started. I would just report to him and do tasks that he had given me, but now umm, I in January I was given the task of umm trying to grow our social media accounts in numbers, so a small part of my role now is to create social media which I have been doing since January and yes that takes a couple of hours per day so not too much. Umm I’ve got two active clients at the minute which are contracts, I think one is £9,000 and the other is only about £3, but I’ve got my own clients there, I go to meet them and find out what the problem is, what they are looking for. Essentially I get given all the small works, anything that isn’t a restaurant or a fit out it goes to me. I deal with the problem that way and and also I do the stuff on the side for my MD’s big project, so I do a lot of the admin stuff which gets passed to me. So yeah I am a lot more busy now, umm it great because I can have my own diary. If I need to go somewhere one day, I can go no questions asked, I can meet clients, I can do whatever really suits me and I think that’s fantastic that I have got a trust relationship with my employees and my MD to let me do that.

DT: Absolutely and that was the word that sprung to my mind actually, trust, they must have great trust in you

P5: Unbelievable

Dt: Umm. So that’s a really nice feeling isn’t it?

P5: Oh yeah its so nice, it was early on actually, after about, it was a bit mad, after about, I think it was my eleventh or twelfth week, informally umm I got offered a graduate job. It was nothing on paper, nothing in the appraisal, it was just very informal saying would you be interested in coming back? And as soon as he asked that I was like this is fantastic, umm it’s very, very (pause) umm, nice to see that the trust that he has given me when I am so young. Everyone I work with is minimum 30, predominantly they are more sort of older, so great to see that umm they have taken well to me and they have been me their time and answered the scenario that I am in.

DT: Oh it sounds fantastic. So do you feel that you have been able to put your own umm stamp on the role? You know so have you changed any processes, improved things?

P5: Yes, so, umm since, It’s a very unique role as it didn’t exist I,I almost created the role. I said I wanted to do these things and help him, my MD and there’s a few things I have changed like (pause) I’ve never really done marketing at all and I have added a few things to our website and I have grown our social media, so an example, in January when I first took over from our twitter we were getting 14,000 impressions per month, umm May just gone we managed to get 26.1 thousand so it’s a significant growth (DT: umm well done), I like to think, I came up with the idea of making a Google map with every single shop fitout that we’ve done, so in total it was a lot, a bit of a miny project for me cause we have 56 jobs we’ve got on record predominantly all in London and I created it for our website, so it’s a visual umm feature for the website, where a customer can look at a map, predominantly London and click on a restaurant, see where it is and it’s just fantastic to see how many projects that we’ve got, we’ve got projects all over the UK and yeah that’s definitely something that I have been proud of. And apart from that I haven’t put my stamp on the work processes, but I have definitely tweaked a few things, yeah its been really interesting. Its mainly learning for me, just soaking everything that’s going on around me.

DT: Yes, absolutely. How did you feel about taking on the social media element when you haven’t got that much experience in the area?

P5: Yeah, so I, I spend a lot of time on social media umm, always keeping up to date, I love, love twitter. I’m not a massive fan, sorry not a massive user of Instagram but I use it, I look at it from time to time and he basically asked me, saying that we could be doing better, umm designers are very big on social media presence websites. So he just said you’re young, you’re enthusiastic, you’re keen, you’re like a dog with a bone when you get something, so would you be comfortable and I said I would give it a go and its just small things like a designer DM’d me on Istagram asking me to create a meeting so I was like yeah brilliant, so I set up a meeting between this designer and the MD and he absolutely loved it, it’s just little connections like that. It’s (pause) rewarding

DT: Yes really rewarding, I can imagine that and exciting for you to have something that you sort of feel is your own alone with the clients

P5: Yeah, it’s been great having my own clients, umm it was, so I started the placement in July and September was the first time I was given my client which was very new to me, very, I was, I remember being on the train and being very scared and not knowing what to expect, umm but yeah, no it worked out really well. It was umm, it was uh just, that was only about 1500 pounds worth of work, but umm it’s quite sad actually, I found out two days ago that they have just shut (DT: oh dear), they were on Princes Street which is just off Regent Street, and its called xxx, a really nice restaurant, really expensive, they just shut which was a bit sad, but yeah that experience of having your own client, just being professional, presenting everything to them, making sure you are both on the same page and most importantly delivering exactly what you say and what you expect and what the customer expects, it’s been a completely new aspect, umm the project management side has been my most favourite. I really enjoyed umm, it’s a lot of organisation, I have my own cost sheets and yeah just dealing with real life money its sometimes I spend a lot of money and think that doesn’t look brill but (laughs), but it is rewarding when you see the money you make back, yeah its great.

DT: Yeah, well done, it sounds fantastic. So what skills and competencies do you think you have developed across the year?

P5: Yeah so I think some of the key ones, umm I think preparation is probably the most important skill that I have learnt. When you go in, even the simplest, when you go into any conversation or something, umm you need to make sure that you know as much as you can, that you have prepared yourself for that conversation or you might look silly especially for meetings. I go to two meetings a week, so we’ve got our internal contracts meeting XXX, which is usually about a couple of hours just basically running through every project and everything that’s going on and umm the one for XXX at the moment which has lots of senior people in it, you’ve got to make sure you are prepared. I’ve found at that its worth spending an hour or two the day before the meeting just putting some notes together, looking at topics that could come up, prepare what you need to say and the best way of delivering that. Umm I also think organisation is very key because I see people at meeting they’ve got notebooks, they’ve got scraps of paper everywhere, how do you manage that. It looks unprofessional, untidy. Umm a big thing for me as well is confidence (DT:good) that’s been a really big one for me. As I said I have never been in this scenario before and to be not chucked into the deep end, but after a couple of months I was a bit uncomfortable situations, but its all for the better. Yeah there the main three skills that I have learnt.

DT: Excellent. Yes I was going to ask you about confidence because often in people’s first jobs it can be a little scary (P5: yes) umm but it does seem that you have developed confidence and that’s fantastic.

P5: Yeah umm its difficult to compare it to anything else as I have only ever worked in XXX and I had that job for two years, 10 months and I had a nice little deal there, I go back to where I live in Hertfordshire to the local store there in summer and at Christmas and then I work in XXX Local in Southbourne during term. I only have that to compare it to, but my confidence has grown tenfold

DT: That’s really good news as well. So obviously you have had a really good opportunity to work with the managing director umm, its sounds as though he had a really positive attitude to you as a placement students (P5: yeah) how would you describe that sort of relationship?

P5: Umm, one Director XXX has been such an inspiration to me, such a role model, he is 50 years old and just ever since I first met him, he’s had such an impact on my life. He’s, first and foremost he has given me this opportunity when he didn’t have to, so when I first met him, he said I have employed young people in the past and it hasn’t worked out because they’ve been lazy, not willing to work, excuses and all that malarkey, so first and foremost one thing I expect from you is to, is to put in everything you got and I said to him 110% I will leave everything I’ve got at work every single day and yes its been great. We do a lot of social events at XXX as well. Which I think is important, I think its good to have a drink with people you work with every now and again. Umm we are going to Newmarket to see Madness on 21 June (DT: that will be fun) yes that will be good, we’ve done lots of different things. We also go to umm trade shows every now and then, Umm so one to one at the N (hesitates)AC, sorry the NEC in Birmingham and also Excel centre in London, its great there cause its networking and he taught me that, XXX taught me that, how important networking is and never cut ties with anyone umm cause you never know when you will come across them again. So its been brilliant, I can’t say it to him, he doesn’t like me to say it to him, but I am so grateful . yeah I won’t say I couldn’t have a better placement experience , but I don’t think its umm anywhere near as bad as what I have heard of other people, I think its great, I’ve really enjoyed it.

DT: Umm, yeah, it sounds like you have had a fantastic opportunity and it sounds as though he’s has been part of giving you that opportunity

P5: Yeah

DT: But also you have given so much back so it’s been a two way process.

P5: Yeah definitely. Umm I think its fair to that. That’s what my parents said to me, older sisters, brother in law said, he’s doing nice stuff for you , but obviously you are working hard, so.

DT: Yep that’s it, win win. Umm do you work very much with the other people in the company?

P5: Yes so, our company is divided into several sections, so you’ve got the estimating team, you’ve got the accounts team, you’ve got the umm the marketing team which I work with quite a bit on social media (pause). They focus on the websites and client enquiries and so that is why social media was passed to me and you’ve got the project management team which is where I sit and where I spend most of my time and yeah you’ve got the MD. So I have spent a little bit of time with the estimating team, but its very specialised. It’s a role that I appreciate, but they take themselves, its very, very (pause) dangerous and risky like(laughs), so I couldn’t do it, I couldn’t do it. So I am interested in learning a bit, but its not for me. We have a joke about it, but that’s it. Accounts umm not particularly, I’ve not really had too much do with accounts. Umm every now and again, XXX who is our finance manager, she will email me and say, XXX have you got a spare hour, can you do this spreadsheet or something like that and of course I am like sure. Project Management is where I spend the majority of my time learning from the other two.

DT: Good. Do I think the environment/ workplace encourages excellence?

P5: (pause), umm as I said the environment is very very laid back, its very chilled, as XXX says himself, we dress very casually so everyone wears a t-shirt and pair of jeans or a shirt, but yeah I wouldn’t say it encourages excellence as I think what we know is that we are very good at what we do, so I wouldn’t say we press for excellence – I’m really sorry I am not giving you a very good answer here (hesitates). I wouldn’t say we, we strive to be the best and excellence, we know what we are good at and (pause) are going in the right direction working with bigger and bigger clients to achieve that.

DT: Ok, so there probably is a certain level of excellence in there as you are getting bigger and bigger clients.

P5: Yeah, exactly.

DT: So if you could change one thing about your placement what would that be?

P5: (pause) ummm, sorry (pause)

DT: I’m putting you under pressure though as it sounds like you have had a really great time

P5: Yeah (pause) obviously there are things that (pause) umm mainly, the one thing that I would say is that I have probably not spent enough time in enough areas other than project management. Umm as I say I do a little bit of marketing, but I think the other areas of the business do some very valuable work and I think, umm I do speak to them a lot, but not too much about work and their skills, so maybe if I spoke to or spent a bit more time with the other departments I would definitely benefit me.

DT: Well that’s perhaps something for when you go back as a graduate

P5: Yes exactly

DT: Yes, yes. As you know my study is about psychological ownership, what does umm ownership in the workplace mean to you? What would you say it is?

P5: Urr, Ownership umm I would say is obviously knowing your role, knowing what’s expected of you, knowing your fellow colleagues and what’s expected of them, uhhh knowing how you conduct yourself, yeah and also urr not thinking that you are amazing at your role and being a bit humble, its good to take constructive criticism sometimes its very beneficial and yeah just being, just being very consistent in what you do.

DT: Yeas, excellent. So do you have any examples of when you’ve have demonstrated ownership?

P5: yes, I have a good one (DT: oh good) umm,XXX which is a seafood restaurant in Brentwood, so that was 20/21 weeks and I my placement started the week after it started and there was a lot of structural work and there was lot of trench digging, yeah so it was, the main concern was that there were a lot of hazards onsite, so XXX my Managing Director asked me if I could go out and externally get a safety advisor to come and do a full report onsite and look at what potential hazards we could avoid and how we could improve health and safety onsite. So I went out to a company called XXX, they came in to the site they dones this for a whole day, they did lots of different diagrams and xxx statements and health and safety documents and produced, put it all in a pack to us and they also put a lot advisories of what we could do better. So I took it upon myself to (pause)go and do these advisories and personally carry out each one till we didn’t have any left. So yeah, it was something I did on my own, it did cost a bit of money, but XXX was really happy, he thought it was great and umm was something we needed.

DT: Excellent and you say this was week two of your placement?

P5: Yes, he asked me to do that on the second week and I was still going around with him. The initial process of, umm when I approached him, umm when I had this company this company in mind and showed him what they offered and he was like, yeah sure that’s great and he just let, let me organise it, so I think they actually came in about week three, week four and carried it out and I didn’t get it back till probably the sixth or seventh week of my placement, so that’s when I went to the site managers and all the different sub-contractors and basically showed them this report and anything that reflected on them, let them know and make them aware and basically give them time scales of when this needed to be done otherwise we’d be fined going forward. Umm yeah it was very scary as I was speaking to some very senior people, looking at this twenty year old boy thinking who is he, but it was good.

DT: Umm did they respond well to you?

P5: Yeah, as I said, Simon introduced me to umm everyone, all the sub-contractors, all the architects and said this is Tom, he’s here on a year’s work placement, he’s learning, so all good.

DT: So it sounds as though you demonstrated feelings of ownership quite early on. Have those feelings changed and developed at all (pause) or do you think you have been consistent throughout?

P5: No, I definitely, I think now umm, I’m still changing and learning the way I work. Umm I its all about finding a balance and I umm show respect but also putting your foot down. Umm If you look at the work hierarchy obviously I’m right at the bottom so I need to be very careful about how I portray myself, how I approach people especially when they are significantly higher (pause) in the chain to me so yeah, even now I am still learning and I think it’s very important how you write emails, that’s something that I learnt very quickly, the importance of writing a good email, what you need to include, how you need to make yourself clear. And yeah something I learnt was its always important to write emails instead of phone calls so that you have a record of it, so later down the line many people at XXX have given me examples of when they have been caught out, so you can’t. you don’t record telephone calls, but you do record emails.

DT: Yep, absolutely always good to send an email afterwards

P5: Yeah,

DT: So, do you notice other people in the organisation demonstrate ownership as well, in their roles or for the company?

P5: yeah, I think umm if I talk about property managers, so the project managers, umm so I would say the most the most pressure is put on them because everyone else has done their bit finance, estimating and it's down to them now to actually deliver and execute the project and there's so many different factors that they need to think about (pause) and do. So (pause) they always go into a world of their own, where it's their project, it's that baby if you like, and they will do whatever they can to put themselves in the best situation and deliver the project successfully. (interruption) Umm, but teah, it's it's this their project, its their baby and it's most importantly that they deliver the project successfully and with the best margin.

DT: That's interesting. I never thought that specific job roles might encourage more ownership. And I think you're absolutely right.

P5: Umm, It's, it's, I wouldn't say it's sad, but it's interesting that how the project managers here manipulate their cost sheet to make it look make the situation is better or worse than what it is. So with a previous PM who's no longer in the company, he would also portray his projects being a better situation than what he is. So he would always manipulate the costs and his call sheet to make his margin healthier. When it comes down to this last projects, he was almost breaking even making a loss. So it is how you (pause) how you umm, work really everyone works differently as well, best style.

DT: I thought I was going to ask you what are perhaps the downsides of having ownership and perhaps that's one of them. Can you think of any other downsides?

P5: Umm and just to say, just to illustrate what you said, with great ownership is great power, great responsibility. We have this little sign in blue in my placement company that you will always want job away from losing your job. One projects away from losing your job. I've seen a couple of people come and go, since my time here and yeah, is is a bit scary that it just puts into perspective how quickly uhh, things can change. It's great when things are going really well and positive, but it doesn't take a lot for it to be negative. Yeah it is interesting.

DT: Interesting. So, as you mentioned previously, that you worked in XXX part time. Do you feel that you showed signs of ownership there was well?

P5: Not particularly I think I'm very sorry, hold on to use an example from one of your lectures and first year, I think was it was Organisational behaviour, I remember the model. It was basically there's two different types of urr, there's two different types of way of working one is basically, you get told what to do, you clock in, clock out and that's it. And there's another model of the situation I'm in now is where, no sorry, what it is you're giving, you're given an aim to achieve and you have to go about it and the other scenario is you giving a task to achieve (pause) and it's also small, smaller tasks and you do it and that’s it. So I'll definitely say I didn't really have much passion or enjoyment for it, there wasn't much reward. I definitely wouldn't say I took ownership. I had a good relationship with the store managers in both my stores. They liked me, that’s why they had this agreement with me that I could come and go as I wanted. But no, I definitely thought I just, umm clocked in, smiled and done my job and clocked out and I didn't really think too much about it

DT: A very transactional relationship?

P5 Yeah umm. Unhuman like, I just think the pure form of clocking in at the start of a shift, not having your phone on you, sometimes being questioned if you go into the toilet or if you go into your back, I don't like that as it's a bit structured and unhuman like. A person's full time work that I've got so much trust. Not saying I don't do the work, but I do my work and its also relaxed as well.

DT: Good. Excellent. Do you think you've umm felt ownership in other ways? So, maybe with uni work or any hobbies or do you think this is the first time we've really shown it?

P5: No I would say this is the first time that I fully been in control and I've been able to impact someone in the way I would want to. I think to put in perspective I think at the end of first year, I got 57%. And I finished second year with 61 and a half and I'm ever using everything I've learned in my placement to take the final year, and I've grown so much in so many ways that I'll be so disappointed about achieving anything less than what I achieved in second year.

DT: I a, sure you're going to do well, no, because you've got that level of determination and desire

P5: So first, sorry, as I mentioned before, when we first started the cycle it's been great to see how many different skills I've learnt and how far a conversation with someone can take you and how much you can learn. At the end of July, I'm going on a course, urr which is a week long course on project management in the building sector. (DT: Very interesting). Yeah, so it's a week long course. It's in. I think it's in Canary Wharf I need to book it. I've been told that I can book it wherever I want one on one, but it costs about 700 pounds. So that's that's a big investment from Simon and yeah, just be great. Again, learning more skills meeting more people. Umm obviously learning from a textbook again, I'm looking forward to that will be great.

DT: Yeah, well, it probably be useful helping you to get back into level six which will be Intensive your remember what studying like again?

P5: Yeah. And it's the pressure as well that you can't really replicate the pressure of exam unless you do one.

DT: Yeah, absolutely. Umm, my final question was about what you're going to do after you graduate. But obviously, umm you've got the job role with the company already, which is fantastic.

P5: Yeah. When I come back in July of 2020, I'll be a fully trained project manager. So at 22 actually, that is a great opportunity. I think. As I said, everyone I work with is a lot older than me. And it's a very unique situation. Yeah, hopefully I can be a XXX for years to come. And I did. I just think about doing a postgraduate degree but I'm not not sure it's for me. I think it's been fantastic to got to University, I've learnt so many things. But I think maybe it's time to to start my career.

DT: Yeah and I think you can go back to postgraduate study. That's always going to be there. So you could work for a few years. You might take do something part time. Yeah. That’s how lots of people do it. Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. And if you want to turn off the record, bottoms now we're finished.