

# E-tray Exercise

Are you ready for the challenges of a career? Here are eight situations for you to test yourself. Some are inter-related so don't look at each one in isolation. This is the sort of test you should expect on your assessment day and the sorts of situations you may encounter once you are employed.

## Business Challenges (kindly supplied by KPMG)

In each situation, select the most appropriate answer. You will get feedback on your choice and coaching on best practice.

### The scenario

Your name is P Smith and you are the Marketing Manager of a company named Reeder. Your boss is Janet Clifton.

Reeder is a retailing company specialising in sales of foods and pharmaceutical products that has branches through the country. Its head office, where you work, is in Birmingham and its Managing Director is George Wilkes.

Reeder hired you because you are an ambitious, positive thinker who'll make things happen. Good luck!

### Question 1 - Conference Confusion

You receive this email from the company MD, George Wilkes...

Subject: Innovations in Drugs Conference 21st October

I've just had a phone conversation with Frank Fielding of Kemiko, who are the major drug manufacturing company organising the above conference. He tells me that there is going to be a presentation by the manufacturers of Supranine, a revolutionary new drug for hay fever sufferers that has just been approved for sale over the counter by retailers in this country. I've read several reviews of this new drug, and it looks set to take a very large share of the overall market.

I feel that the market in hay fever remedies is one that we have never properly got to grips with in this company, and since the size of this sector of the market expands every year, we must do something about this. We also regularly see drug sales plummet in the spring and summer months when cold remedies are not selling - increased sales of hay fever products would help to reduce this.

I've arranged a meeting with Karen for the week after the conference to discuss this, but she is on holiday the week before and therefore cannot attend the conference itself. I want you to make sure that you bring back a copy of all handouts relating to this product and any other information that you think we'll need when coming to our decision as to whether or not to market this product.

What do you do?

- A - Attend the conference
- B - Send someone else
- C - Don't attend but order material to be sent

## Question 2 - Company Car

You receive this email from R. Patel...

Subject: Delivery of new company car

I've completed final negotiations with the garage supplying your new company car. They'll have it ready for collection between 3 and 5 pm on Thursday 21 October, so I would be grateful if you could arrange for it to be collected at that time. They have agreed to include the sunroof, remote alarm and the CD player at the price we originally agreed. I've also arranged for your old car to be collected from the car park at Head Office on the afternoon of the same day.

Please let me know immediately of any faults that you notice. When we're paying this amount of money for a car it should be perfect!

What do you do?

- A - Collect the car yourself
- B - Arrange to collect the car another day
- C - Arrange for someone else to collect the car

## Question 3 - Legal Action

You receive this email from susan.yu@grabit&runne.co.uk, the company's legal advisers.

Subject: Impending legal action by Kwono of Japan

I've been notified by our office in the Far East that Kwono is seriously considering taking legal action as a result of your high profile launch last month of Fango toothpaste. It appears that the name 'Fango' was registered by Kwono three years ago and has been used by them for a highly successful cream to treat athlete's foot in Japan and throughout the Far East. Last year 'Fango' was apparently the most popular over-the-counter foot care product in Japan, and they have plans to market the product in Europe. Kwono is very unhappy that another product has been launched under the same name.

What do you do?

- A - Immediately forward email to Janet Clifton and George Wilkes for them to action
- B - Reply to email seeking legal advice, 'cc'-ing it on to Janet Clifton and George Wilkes
- C - Reply to email seeking legal advice

## Question 4 - Charity Calls

You receive this letter:

FROM:

National Society for Handicapped Children  
PO Box 158  
LONDON  
NW2 5TD

TO: Head of Marketing

Reeder Ltd  
44 Moat House Lane  
BIRMINGHAM

Dear Sir or Madam,

As you know, we are one of the leading charities presently helping children and young people who suffer from a wide range of handicaps. There is a vast amount of work for us to do to bring some hope into the lives of many thousands of children, but unfortunately we find that our funds are not enough to enable us to do what we feel needs to be done.

We rely very heavily on support from the public, and in particular from corporate sponsorship and donations to enable us to carry on with our work. To this end we have arranged a major fundraising concert on 12 December to be held at Symphony Hall in Birmingham, featuring the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Choir.

In order for this to be the success that we hope for, we are asking local businesses to support the event with sponsorship or a donation. We would be grateful for donations of whatever size, but if you feel able to contribute 1000 or more we would be able to arrange some corporate entertaining for a party of you and your guests at the concert. Businesses have told us in the past that they find this type of entertaining a very pleasant way of thanking customers or staff for their support.

I do hope that you will feel able to help us in this way. If you would like any further information about our organisation or the work that we do, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,  
Richard Smethhurst  
(Head of Fundraising)

What do you do?

- A - Refer to Janet Clifton
- B - Refuse donation
- C - Give donation or sponsorship

### **Question 5 - It's big news!**

Reading the paper on the way to work you see this article...

Boots for Sainsbury's

Retailing giants Boots and Sainsbury's yesterday announced a deal which will see the chemist chain's Health and Beauty shops opening on supermarket sites. Initially the openings will be on an experimental basis in seven stores, but if the experiment works, observers believe that the format could be introduced widely throughout the Sainsbury's superstore chain.

Both companies were being cagey about the project's potential yesterday. A Sainsbury's spokeswoman would only say that if successful it is hoped to extend the trial into other stores. But one analyst said: "This has potentially enormous importance in the longer term". Initially the experiment will be restricted to stores in St Albans, Ipswich, Dulwich, Camberley, Poole, Sevenoaks, and Hemel Hempstead; Sainsbury's will provide space and charge Boots rent.

Boots' high street shops have been under pressure from Superdrug and other competitors who have undercut Boots on perfumes, sun creams and condoms. But Boots' spokeswoman could not comment on the company's pricing strategy in the experimental concessions, and it is not known whether prices would match those in high street health and beauty shops. Sainsbury's already has five concessions with Lloyds Chemists, and 12 Sketchley dry cleaners.

What do you do?

- A - Email summary of article to Janet Clifton
- B - File it in your 'miscellaneous reports' file
- C - Save it to deal with later

### **Question 6 - Drinks do**

You receive this email from Fred Hill, a manager at your level and working in a closely related area:

Subject: Drinks Do: Old Bell, Queens Rd, This Friday

As you may have heard, Marianne and I got engaged on Saturday, and we will be celebrating this at the Bell and Anchor on Friday. We hope that you will be able to join us at about 5.30 after work for a few drinks, and then to go on for a Chinese banquet at about 7.30. We need to book numbers at the restaurant, so please let me know whether you will be able to come.

Boyfriends/girlfriends/husbands/wives are very welcome of course!

The following post-it note also arrives on your desk:

Your girlfriend/boyfriend phoned while you were away from your desk and asked me to give you the message that he/she has managed to book theatre tickets for the Regent Theatre on Queens Road for Friday night. Performance starts at 7.45pm. Please call back to confirm whether or not you can make it.

What do you do?

- A - Go to Fred's drinks and theatre
- B - Go to Fred's drinks, meal and theatre
- C - Go to Fred's drinks and meal
- D - Go to Fred's drinks only

### Question 7 - Business Development

Minutes from a Business Development Committee meeting

1. Proposed extension of range of ready meals.

F Hill reported back to the committee on this matter. There appears to be considerable evidence that ready meals are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in the larger towns and cities where the main buyers appear to be office workers who buy meals during the day to save cooking for themselves in the evening. These products have a high margin. The potential problem with them is that they have a very short shelf life. Foreign foods and "healthy" foods appear to be more popular than other types.

G Wilks proposed that a detailed costing exercise should be carried out. F Hill suggested that customer opinion could be sought in branches. J Clifton agreed to arrange this. Further discussion was deferred to the next meeting.

2. Introduction of lockable display cabinets.

K Milward reported that she was very unhappy about the introduction of lockable glass covers over many products in branches. Although the committee had approved this three months ago, she felt that it was acting as a considerable deterrent to customers buying products, and sales had suffered accordingly. K Milward agreed to provide further detailed analysis of the fall in sales by line and the effect on profit. R West agreed to quantify the fall in pilferage levels since these cabinets have been introduced. The matter would be further reviewed in the light of this information at the next meeting.

3. New branch opening.

J Clifton stated that arrangements for the opening of the new branch in Southport on 18 November were well in hand. All the normal publicity had been arranged for the event with exception of the 2-page spread in the Southport Advertiser, which has not yet been arranged because they do not accept advertisements more than 1 month in advance of publication. The design work for the spread has been prepared. It was planned to appear in the 12 November edition. It was agreed that P Smith would arrange this.

4. Seasonal fluctuations in pharmaceutical product sales.

G Wilks stated that he was concerned about the low sales in pharmaceutical products over the summer months that are experienced every year. Although this is due to very low sales in cough and cold remedies which yield high profits in the winter months, he felt that there were areas that we could expand which would compensate for this to some extent, such as insect repellent, hay fever treatments and skincare products. He is currently reviewing a number of possible products and hopes to have further information available for the next meeting.

5. Results for last month.

GW congratulated everyone, particularly the food sales staff, on very good results.

6. Any other business.

None.

What do you do?

- A - Arrange branch opening publicity immediately
- B - Organise customer research immediately
- C - Arrange branch opening publicity and organise customer research
- D - Delegate branch opening publicity

## Question 8 - Synchronised Sponsorship

You receive this letter...

FROM:

The Synchronised Swimming Society  
University of Chester  
Western Road  
CHESTER

TO:

Marketing Manager  
Reeder Ltd  
44 Moat House Lane  
BIRMINGHAM

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing on behalf of our society, which was formed last year, in the hope that you will feel able to sponsor us on a tour of the Greek islands. We hope to tour the islands next May for two weeks with a team of about 10 people. We plan to give demonstrations of synchronised swimming in the sea and swimming pools and to raise the profile of the sport in general by our presence.

We will be able to display the Reeder name and logo prominently on our swimwear, thus giving a high degree of exposure to your company. We will also be able to publicise the use of some of the food and beauty products that you sell, for example waterproof cosmetics and slimming products (as several of our team have recently been on diets and will happily attribute their success to one or more of the diet programmes that you sell).

We would hope that you would consider a figure in the region of 8,000 reasonable for such sponsorship. We look forward to hearing from you, and feel sure that this arrangement will be very beneficial to us both in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Alison Worth  
Secretary

What do you do?

- A - Bin the letter
- B - Accept sponsorship
- C - Write a declining letter

# E-tray exercise answers

## Question 1

A Attend the conference

Good answer! This is the most appropriate response. While your MD does not actually tell you that you have to attend, his last sentence assumes you will. Emails very often get written 'on the fly' without the attention to detail of more traditional messages, so you need to look out for underlying instructions. To make the situation absolutely clear and demonstrate your efficiency you should reply to the email, very briefly, confirming your attendance.

B Send someone else

No - you should have gone in person. While your MD does not actually tell you that you have to attend, his last sentence assumes you will. Emails very often get written 'on the fly' without the attention to detail of more traditional messages, so you need to look out for underlying instructions. Ideally, to make the situation absolutely clear and demonstrate your efficiency, you would have returned the email with a brief confirmation of your attendance.

C Don't attend but order material to be sent

No - you simply cannot rely on others to send you the information. A conference organiser's mission is to get maximum attendance, and then to be focused on delegates who attend. They'll have little motivation to help you, and even if they agree to over the phone, may simply not get round to it.

You may possibly have felt that this was a demeaning task for someone of your potential, but sometimes you need to do these things. While your MD does not actually tell you that you must attend, his last sentence assumes you will. Emails very often get written 'on the fly' without the attention to detail of more traditional messages, so you need to look out for underlying instructions.

So, ideally, you would have attended and, to make the situation absolutely clear and demonstrate your efficiency returned the email with a brief confirmation of your attendance.

## Question 2

A Collect the car yourself

Bad answer! OK, so it's a new car, and you want to pick it up yourself. But hold on, isn't there something else you should be doing today? A little matter of the 'Innovations in Drugs' Conference, which you promised your MD you'd attend. We did warn you at the beginning some situations were inter-related!

You should have arranged to collect it on another day - you might even get the car sooner. Or alternatively you could possibly have found someone else to collect it for you.

B Arrange to collect the car another day

Good answer! Even though it's a new company car, and you want to pick it up, you've realised the priority that day is the 'Innovations in Drugs' Conference, which you promised

your MD you'd attend. Well done.

C Arrange for someone else to collect the car

Yes, even though it's a new company car, and you want to pick it up yourself, you've realised the priority that day is the 'Innovations in Drugs' Conference, which you promised your MD you'd attend.

When you finally get the car remember Mr Patel did ask you to inform him of any faults - but then would you really ignore any?

### Question 3

A Immediately forward email to Janet Clifton and George Wilkes for them to action

This is not a good answer! While it is important to inform senior staff and indeed seek their guidance, you should and would be expected to do more.

As a manager, and with all those years of university experience, you should be able to develop an action plan to deal with the situation. The incident obviously has the potential to be very damaging. However, you might feel better if you run your solution past your seniors before you implement it.

B Reply to email seeking legal advice, 'cc'-ing it on to Janet Clifton and George Wilkes

Yes! This is the most appropriate action. This legal action could have major implications for Reeder so it is good that you have immediately called the firms' legal advisors to action immediately. You've also realised the damaging potential of the incident and kept your directors informed.

C Reply to email seeking legal advice

Almost there! This legal action could have major implications for Reeder so you've done well to start the ball rolling with the firms' legal advisors. However, you should have realised the damaging potential of the incident and consequently the need to notify senior staff.

### Question 4

A Refer to Janet Clifton

Not the perfect choice! It's important to discuss ad hoc opportunities with your director, however it seems you are just passing the buck! You may need Janet's input to advise you on the company policy on charities. You may have a charity-marketing budget, there may be a single charitable cause or event that you support, or quite simply, it's sad but true that some organisations refuse all such advances.

You'll only be fully fulfilling your role when you give your opinion before passing things on. This particular event actually gives Reeder these benefits:

- Helps company profile by being seen as a caring company.
- The opportunity is on target with our market sector, giving the maximum PR value.
- It can be cost-effectively used to entertain clients as well.

So the ideal response would have been to have identified the benefits and recommended participation as far as policy/budget allowed.

#### B Refuse donation

Are you sure? Actually you've not been given sufficient information to do this. You'll need to check the company policy on charities. You may have a charity-marketing budget and there may be a single charitable cause or event that you support, or quite simply it's sad but true that some organisations refuse all such advances.

You should have identified that this particular event actually gives Reeder these benefits:

- Helps company profile by being seen as a caring company.
- The opportunity is on target with our market sector, giving the maximum PR value.
- It can be cost-effectively used to entertain clients as well.

So the ideal response would have been to have identified the benefits and recommended participation as far as policy/budget allowed.

#### C Give donation or sponsorship

A generous approach! However you've not been given sufficient information to do this. You'll need to check the company policy on charities. You may have a charity-marketing budget, there may be a single charitable cause or event you support, or quite simply it's sad but true that some organisations refuse all such advances.

Part of your reasoning to do it should have been that this event actually gives Reeder these benefits:

- Helps company profile by being seen as a caring company.
- The opportunity is on target with our market sector, giving the maximum PR value.
- It can be cost-effectively used to entertain clients as well.

### Question 5

#### A Email summary of article to Janet Clifton

Yes! This is simple but useful market intelligence. It's important that you and your boss are aware of current issues, happenings and trends in your marketplace. From this big picture, you're better able to carry out your marketing functions. You'll probably get recognition for being on the ball as well. But don't go overboard and send every article you see to Janet - just the major ones.

#### B File it in your 'miscellaneous reports' file

Really? Do you honestly ever return to your 'Miscellaneous reports' file? If you don't, you've effectively just binned it. You need to realise that this is simple but useful market intelligence. It's important that you and your boss are aware of current issues, happenings and trends in your marketplace. From this big picture you are better able to carry out your marketing functions.

You may have decided it was enough to simply read it and inwardly digest. But it would be good to alert Janet to it as well. In addition you'd probably get recognition for being on the

ball.

C Save it to deal with later

This is OK, as you probably have higher priority things to do first thing in the morning. After all you have read and inwardly digested the article.

You need, however, to realise that this is simple but useful market intelligence. It's important that you and your boss are aware of current issues, happenings and trends in your marketplace. From this big picture you are better able to carry out your marketing functions.

So at some stage in the day it would be good to alert Janet to it as well, a chat by the coffee machine will do. Best practice would be to summarise the article and email it to Janet, or at least send her the article to read in full. For this you'll no doubt get some recognition as well.

### Question 6

A Go to Fred's drinks and theatre

A good answer, as you're trying to reconcile your work related social engagements with your personal life. Fred is a manager at your level, and works in a closely related area, so it could be worthwhile and polite to accept the drinks at least.

Ideally you'd called your significant other, in response to their telephone message, to confirm you are on for the theatre and see if they can come for drinks at the Bell as well.

B Go to Fred's drinks, meal and theatre

How are you going to manage this? The times of the theatre and meal clash. You'll leave someone annoyed with you. Fred is a manager at your level, and works in a closely related area, so it could be worthwhile polite to accept the drinks at least. You then need to reconcile your work related social engagements with your personal life.

It might be best to call your significant other, in response to their earlier telephone message, ask them to the Bell and agree on what to do after.

C Go to Fred's drinks and meal

Are you sure? Fred is a manager at your level, and works in a closely related area, so it could be worthwhile and polite to accept the drinks at least. But you need to reconcile your work related social engagements with your personal life.

D Go to Fred's drinks only

What's gone wrong? You've two invitations to do other things after drinks at the Bell. Don't you want to do either?

Fred is a manager at your level, and works in a closely related area, so it would be worthwhile and polite to accept the drinks invitation. But that doesn't mean you can't go out with your partner later, or invite him/her along to the Bell.

## Question 7

A Arrange branch opening publicity immediately

Not the best choice! In item 3 you were specifically singled out to arrange publicity, and are getting on with it, which is good. But what about item 1 where customer opinion was to be sought in branches, with J. Clifton, your boss, agreeing to do it? Obviously this is a task for you, or at the very least you need to go through it with Janet. You shouldn't have just ignored it.

You must learn to read minutes and memos and not miss points like this. Meetings can fall apart if members cannot be relied on to carry out the agreed actions.

B Organise customer research immediately

Not perfect! You spotted that in item 1 customer opinion was to be sought in branches, with J. Clifton, your boss agreeing to do this. Obviously this is a task for you. Well spotted, and good initiative for getting on with it. I assume you either told Janet at the end of the meeting you'd start on it right away or that you'll email her so she knows it's being done.

This is good, but what about the publicity for the new branch in item 3? You were specifically singled out as the person responsible. You must not miss obvious points like this. Meetings can fall apart if members cannot be relied on to carry out the agreed actions.

C Arrange branch opening publicity and organise customer research

A good answer! You spotted that in item 1 customer opinion was to be sought in branches, with J. Clifton, your boss agreeing to do this. Obviously this is a task for you. Well spotted, and good initiative for getting on with it. I assume you either told Janet at the end of the meeting you'd start on it right away or that you'll email her so she knows it's being done.

You also saw that in item 3 you were specifically singled out to arrange publicity, and are getting on with that as well. You are showing great management potential.

D Delegate branch opening publicity

Think again! Not only have you delegated a task you were specifically tasked with in item 3, you've missed item 1. J. Clifton, your boss, agreed to seek customer opinion in branches. Obviously this task is for you and you need to do something about it.

You must learn to read minutes and memos and not miss points like this. Meetings fall apart if members cannot be relied on to carry out the agreed actions.

## Question 8

A Bin the letter

For all you know the sender may have powerful friends in your organisation so in addition to a short letter of rejection you should have mentally noted the reasons.

These should have included:

- it's not aligned with business objectives;
- it's far too expensive;
- there's no logical business link for this partnership;
- it opens the floodgates to other dubious requests.

B Accept sponsorship

Bad choice! It should have been rejected with the reasons including:

- it's not aligned with business objectives;
- it's far too expensive;
- there's no logical business link for this partnership;
- it opens the floodgates to other dubious requests.

Unless of course, you know something we don't and the charity has a special connection with the MD. But if it's your budget that's being spent you should make your concerns known. With so many organisations reliant on charity these days, it's important to only make alliances that are beneficial both ways. Bad experiences can lead to organisations totally dropping sponsorships; a loss to your marketing strength, and a loss for the charities.

C Write a declining letter

Well done! Despite this rather far-fetched approach you've taken the trouble to reply. Even rejections can be beneficial as the other party knows where they stand and were treated well. The reputation of being hard but fair has never damaged a business.

It's always worth properly analysing your reasons and they should have included:

- it's not aligned with business objectives;
- it's far too expensive;
- there's no logical business link for this partnership;
- it opens the floodgates to other dubious requests.

**We hope you found this exercise useful. If you would like any further help with in-tray exercises, please speak to a member of staff.**