

Carolyn

WR 13100

Professor Clauss

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Hey, What's Up?

As I walked into the loud, dimly lit, and strongly perfumed Hollister store, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. It was a typical trip to the Smith Haven Mall on a crisp, Long Island November day. My friends Gavin and Kristi had just gotten jobs at Hollister so I decided to stop in and say hi. Sure enough, Gavin was working right at the front of the store. After chatting for a while he told me that Hollister was in need of more staff for the Christmas season, and that it made him look good to the managers if he recruited people. To do him a favor and because I needed a job, I decided to fill out an application. It seemed almost too easy. Little did I know then, Hollister would prove to be a miserable place to work.

Employees working at Hollister are treated impersonally from the very beginning of the hiring process. A few days after submitting my application, I received a call about an interview. As I drove to the mall after school, I tried to prepare myself for the interview. I suspected they'd ask the standard job interview questions like, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "What qualifies you for this position?" I was surprised when I walked into the store and saw about fifteen other hopefuls awkwardly sitting by the cash registers. I expected that maybe someone would come out and call each of us into an interview individually, but that was not the case. The interviewer, Sue,

who was one of the store's three managers, arrived about twenty minutes late and called the herd of us out of the store and into the main area of the mall, as shoppers walked past trying to dodge our misplaced assembly. After getting picked on to answer many meaningless questions such as, "What does Hollister mean to you?" and "How has the Hollister brand impacted your life?" we were faced with the task of going around in the circle so that each of us could be judged on how we say the phrase "Hey, What's up?" This is a necessary job qualification because employees are required to say the exact phrase to each customer they see. This was certainly not the interview I had prepared for, and in that moment I realized the manager did not see me as individual employee, but just as one piece in a group of many.

Because the managers don't know most of their employees personally, they are not able to trust their staff. I first learned this at my employee training session. The other new workers and I had to watch a video explaining the strict policies of using our twenty percent employee discount, how to keep an eye out to make sure other employees are not stealing any merchandise, and the harsh consequences of any employee theft. We also learned some other rules, like how when we punch out at the end of each shift, employees are not allowed to leave the store until they hunt down a manager to search their bag for stolen goods and walk them out of the store. I remember one day, after I punched out at eight o'clock, I approached all three managers, Sue, Jay, and Nicole, asking for a walk out, but each was too busy. I wasn't able to finally leave the store until Nicole finally decided she could walk me out at about around 9 o'clock. This wasted hour could have been

prevented if the managers got to know their employees, and possibly trust them to leave the store on their own.

That was certainly not the only time the impersonal attitudes of the managers affected me in a negative way. One of the biggest grudges I still hold with Hollister was formed about a month after I began working. One day when I went to work, Sue received a call from Kat, the manager at the Abercrombie store in the mall. Someone had not shown up to work that day in Abercrombie, and since Abercrombie and Fitch owns both Hollister and Abercrombie; they sent me to fill in at the other store. I asked both Sue and Kat numerous times if and how I should punch in at Abercrombie, and they told me they would take care of it. I insisted on giving them my employee ID number so that they could record the hours I was working. After convincing me that everything was taken care of, I worked my five-hour shift. When my paycheck came that week, the hours for the day that I had worked at Abercrombie were not on it. I talked to the managers of both stores again, and they assured me that the time would be put onto my next paycheck, and the next one, and the next one. Long story short, I am still waiting for five hours of pay from December 8, 2011. Since I was nothing but just another employee in the eyes of Sue and Kat, this payroll slip wasn't an important issue to them.

Although they didn't take the time to get to know us, the managers were extremely concerned with our appearance. Hollister has a "look policy" that states exactly how employees are to appear while they are working. A major component of the look policy is the outfit. Employees are required to buy the outfit they are told to wear to work, and a new outfit is required about every month. I'll never forget the day Sue handed

me my first paycheck, as well as a brand new outfit I needed to buy. First, I had to try on the outfit and get it approved by Sue, as well as get my picture taken wearing it. Next, I tore open the envelope to reveal that I had made eighty-six dollars. Not bad, I thought. However, when I went to the register to buy my required clothes, even after my employee discount the total came to sixty-six dollars. I was beyond crushed. I had worked hard for that eighty-six bucks, and now I had to spend it on something I didn't even want or need. It was that day that I first felt the financial sting of working somewhere so concerned with image.

This focus on image not only cost me money, but a lot of time and frustration as well. Since Hollister's primary concern is its image, they have many rules for their employees to preserve their image on a day-to-day basis. One of these requirements was having hair down and in natural waves as well as natural but fresh looking make up. One girl who I made friends with during my time at Hollister, Ali, had golden brown hair. She desperately wanted to dye her hair blonde, but couldn't because it was against the look policy. In other words, whatever hair color Hollister hired us with, was the hair color we had to maintain during our employment. On my first day of work, Nicole made me go to the Sephora in the mall to take my nail polish off, as well as take out one pair of my earrings and take off my necklace and ring. This was again because of the look policy, which states that's employees must only be wearing clear nail polish on fingers, one pair of stud earrings, and a watch. Another aspect of the look policy was that employees must wear only red or pink nail polish on toes. Toes need to be painted because no matter what time of the year it is, employees must wear flip flops to showcase the "beachy vibe"

Hollister wants to emanate. Making sure I always met all of these standards before going to work was a huge burden on my time.

Once I was prepped and presentable enough to actually go to work, the speakers in the store proved to be a constant annoyance. Music is blasting inside of Hollister constantly, making it difficult to speak or even think. I'm convinced that working a long shift while hearing the same four songs blaring over and over again could make anyone question their own sanity, it certainly made me. I'll never forget the first time I heard Carly Rae Jepsen's hit "Call Me Maybe". It was one of my first days at work when the pop came blasting out of the speakers. I estimate that during my brief Hollister career, I've probably been forced to listen to it about two hundred and fifty times, and cringe at the sound of it now. Not only is it repetitive, but Hollister's music is also played much, much louder than necessary.

Other than not being able to hear well inside a Hollister store, it is also very difficult to see. Lights are placed sparsely and dimly throughout the space, making it hard for some customers to clearly see the clothes that they are purchasing. I vividly remember a woman storming back into the store yelling, frustrated that what she had bought was not at all what she thought it was. She stated her case to me, saying that she had purchased a pink shirt for her daughter, but once she got out into the light, it was a completely different color, terrible quality, and the wrong size. When I looked into her bag I knew exactly the mistake she had made, the shirt looked pink then and there, but I had seen this shirt in the stockroom and knew that it was actually a very red color. I calmed her down and led her to a manager, who allowed her to return the shirt. I can

completely understand her frustration; I would've thought the shirt was pink if I didn't know better from my experience working in the dim lighting.

This was not the only experience I had dealing with a customer, and I don't think our training adequately showed us how to help customers. The first time someone asked me for a fitting room, I was so lost. I asked another employee, Jenny, who also didn't know. Then I asked Ashley, then Nick, and finally Danielle, who was the first one of us who knew where the fitting room key was. It's annoying for us employees to feel so out of place, as well as for customers to have to wait around for us to figure out what to do. Personally, if I have a job I want to perform it well, and being so unprepared for such common tasks was a huge frustration to me.

The sum of these all of the frustrations I experienced at work wore on me quickly. My employment at Hollister lasted about a month and a half before I finally quit. I picked up the phone and called Sue, and told her I couldn't make the commute after school anymore, the first bogus excuse that came to my mind. As soon as I hung up the phone, I felt as though a huge weight was lifted off of my shoulders. No more blasting pop beats, no more wearing flip-flops in the middle of winter, and no more wasted paychecks. The first thing I did was paint my nails hot pink, just because I could. After spending most of my hard earned money on Hollister clothes, I had little to show for my first experience in retail. Hollister truly proved to be a miserable place to work.