

Key messages for article introduction

- We are an international business with three offices in the UK (Newcastle, Aberdeen and London) and six additional offices (Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Paris, Dusseldorf, Madrid) in Europe;
- We have an international executive search team and a team focused on the local market based in London, who service clients locally and globally, including Carlsberg and Beiersdorf, and British clients such as Hovis/Premier Foods;
- Generally, we service big UK based companies with offices in London/the South and therefore Mark usually travels to the London office via train at least two times per month;
- On this occasion, he was travelling down to interview potential new consultants: we have had a big hiring campaign in London recently and have been inundated with applications; as well as training new employees;
- The office was set up as an assessment center and Mark was spending the day watching presentations as well as conducting interviews;
- He also caught up with his managers, and was briefed on all of the latest assignments the business is working on;
- We have hired and trained 15 new consultants in our UK businesses over the last six months, with more likely to start in the New Year;
- Our aim has been to rapidly strengthen our 'centre in Newcastle; we now need to replicate this in London and then Aberdeen;
- We have already hired 38 new consultants across the group this year to manage an increased demand for our service and we're anticipating confirming over 50 new hires by the end of 2014;
- The business just enjoyed its second best quarter, and Newcastle its best ever month (October) in its 27 year history;
- Mark also regularly travels to Aberdeen where our global Oil and Gas division is based but usually flies to Aberdeen as you can't travel in a day via train;
- Fantastic rail links in the North East, easy to do business here;
- In Newcastle, great candidates are not out of reach for us and we regularly utilise the rail network to interview top people for NE companies such as Sage, Formica;
- Taking the train means you can easily meet at the station and travel back. Can't do that on the plane.

Newcastle – London

- The train left on time; ate a nice full English breakfast and attendants were all very professional, attentive and polite.
- Read my free copy of The Times. I worked all the way down; it's really easy to work. I sent a lot of emails, reviewed and made notes on the CVs of the people I was meeting in London and completed various other administrative tasks.
- The internet connection and speed was great.
- The carriage was about three quarters full; so it was busy but not crowded. I moved to a single seat to allow someone to sit with their friends. It's usually the case that you can find more space fairly easily by moving seats.
- Halfway into the journey, however, one half of the carriage I was in lost power. It didn't affect me, but people sat on the other side had to use free sockets on my side to charge phones etc.
- There was a slight delay on the way down by about 35 minutes due to signal failure around the Doncaster area.
- My train arrived at 10:20am which meant I had to miss my 10:30am meeting and instead head straight to Brewin Dolphin.
- I was able to get a taxi fairly easily, although there were queues, which is common.
- I arrived at Brewin Dolphin at 10:45am. It was quite a poor delay on reflection as it did mess my day up a bit.
- East Coast stated on the way back that they give half a refund if you're train is delayed by half an hour. This wasn't actually communicated on the way down.

- All in all, the entire journey was a pleasant one and I was well looked after by a professional group of people.
- The attendants treat everyone equally well. I don't get first class very often but I certainly don't remember the service being as good as it was on this occasion. It was like the service you would expect in a nice restaurant or hotel.

Timeline

- Left home at 6.30am
- Drove to NW office and parked
- Arrived at Newcastle Central Station at 7am
- Train left on time at 7.04am
- Announcement of delay at Doncaster at 9am
- Train arrived at Kings Cross at 10:20am
- Waited in taxi queue for 10 minutes
- Taxi to Brewin Dolphin took 15 mins
- Taxi arrived at Brewin Dolphin at 10:45am
- Taxi cost £8

London - Newcastle

- Got the 7pm out of Kings Cross; the train was less busy but I moved again to a single seat to allow people to sit together at one of the larger tables.
- About 45 minutes into the journey, just south of Peterborough, we stopped for almost the whole night.
- This was due to the fact that 1000 meters of overhead power lines had fallen onto the northern bound line, which had apparently just missed one of the trains ahead of us.
- We stood still for about 2.5 hours before finally joining a single running track heading north. We were the 3rd train in the queue to get through northbound.
- I thought East Coast handled the situation very well though. One particular guard – Barry Anderson - was excellent.
- At first he was honest and said he didn't know what was causing the delay, but then every ten minutes, he provided the train with an update on what was happening.
- When the actual problem became known, he was very clear and honest about the fact that we were going to be stuck for a while.
- He just kept communicating all of the time in a very professional manner.
- For someone who was likely starting another shift when the train finally arrived in Edinburgh, he kept up his level of professionalism and pleasantness all through the night. Good attention to detail; always helpful.
- The East Coast website also updated you with all of the details of the delay as well as alternative routes.
- In first class, we had all of the usual access to free tea and coffee. When it got to 11pm, everyone (including standard class) was offered free soft drinks and Wifi.
- When this happened, however, the internet connection slowed down considerably. That was quite annoying, but I was still able to send emails and plan my diary for the following day.
- The attendants also went round each person, trying to help them organise their forward journey as many connections would no longer be running.
- Because the train was so delayed, however, it had to take a couple detours (there were probably two additional stops added to the journey overall) to collect other people who had been left stranded at other stations.
- The carriage got progressively colder after midnight and it was annoying when it got closer to 3am to still have the bright lights on in the carriage.
- The other attendants, although not as attentive as they were on the way down, were still good despite the delay.
- It was a calm train, despite the disruption and this was definitely due to the level of communication that took place. I was quite impressed overall.

Timeline

- Left NW office on foot at 6.30pm
- Arrived at Kings Cross at 6.50pm
- Train departed on time at 7pm
- Train stopped at 7:45pm
- Announcement of details of the issue on the line at 8pm
- Announcement of details of refund at 8.45pm
- Clarification of likely time of delay was constant every 15mins (Just told it would be a long time)
- Train started moving again at 10:20pm
- Train arrived at Newcastle Central Station at 3.25am (5.5 hours late)
- Walked to office to collect car and drove home
- Arrived home at 4am