

Providing Institution:  Saint Petersburg State University

You are going to read an extract from a novel by B. S. Johnson about a young accountant. For questions A1-A8, circle the answer (1, 2, 3 or 4) which you think fits best according to the text.

Christie Malry

Christie Malry was a simple person. It did not take him long to realise that he had not been born into money; that he would therefore have to acquire it as best as he could; that there were unpleasant penalties for acquiring it by those methods considered to be criminal by society; that there were other methods not considered criminal by society; and that the course most likely to benefit him would be to place himself next to the money, or at least next to those who were making it. He therefore decided that he should become a bank employee.

At the interview formally granted to all new employees by one of the bank's General Managers at Head Office, Christie's minimal qualifications were laid bare, his appearance scrutinised, and his nervousness remarked on. Then he was asked why he wished to join the bank. Christie was lost, could not think of his answer. One was shortly supplied for him: most young men joined the bank for the security, for the very liberal pension which amounted to two-thirds of whatever salary the employee was receiving at retiring age. And this retiring age itself was as an act of generosity - sixty, and not sixty-five!

Not only was Christie simple, he was young, too, a few weeks past his seventeenth birthday at the time of this interview. Christie was silent even at the information that he had only forty-three and not forty-eight years to wait before he was free. The whole impetus of the interview was towards his providing a standard set of correct answers or losing points for wrong answers. Christie was accepted into the service of the bank despite his inadequacy at providing the correct answers; his failure to give any answers at all did not count against him as much as a succession of wrong answers. And, for reasons Christie was just about to experience for himself, the bank had difficulty in holding on to recruits of his age and therefore deliberately took on far more than it knew would stay the long course to early retirement and two-thirds of an honest penny.

So Christie started at the Hammersmith branch of this nationally-known concern one Monday morning in October. From the comparative shelter of his school it was a painful transposition. Christie had expected to have to work hard, and to find the work both inappropriate and servile, at first. What he did not expect was the atmosphere in which he was expected to work, and which was created by his fellow-employees or colleagues as they were in the habit of calling one another. This atmosphere was acrid with frustration, boredom and jealousy, black with anger, pettiness and bureaucracy. It was partly a result of the ageing of the premises in which the bank had set out to carry on business: for despite the modernity of computer-based accounts and to every colleague his own personal adding machine, the original investment in mahogany, marble and brass had been so great as to make it impossible to sweep it away and think about banking all over again.

In this atmosphere Christie quickly became bitter and unhappy himself. Nor did he feel himself to be nearer, in any sense that mattered, money. His job consisted of listing the amounts of cheques on an adding machine and at the end of the day comparing his total with that of the cashiers. Two days out of three it did not agree; and on these days he had to go through the cheques again, calling the amounts to Margaret, who checked them on the list until they found the error. Sometimes they could shorten the process by looking for an exact amount that had been missed or included twice. But this was rare. Usually, it would be a variation in the decimal point one way or the other which would throw the whole thing out. Very rarely indeed it would be the cashier who had made an error and not Christie. Christie saw the Manager of the branch most infrequently; he remained in his office and summoned his subordinates. Christie did not rank high enough to be an underling, in this sense. The Chief Accountant and the Assistant Accountant hardly noticed Christie either, except to lecture him icily on those

occasions when totals did not agree or when he (as often happened) committed some other banking solecism. The clerks and cashiers formed a closed group: they were mature men and women.

- A1. Christie Malry made up his mind to become a bank employee because he
1. thought the bank was a place for making easy money.
 2. thought the job was important for society.
 3. wanted to be close to wealthy people.
 4. was keen to learn about banking methods.
- A2. When asked why he wished to join the bank, Christie
1. said he needed social security.
 2. failed to give any answer.
 3. referred to the very liberal pension.
 4. simply showed his qualification documents.
- A3. In order to succeed at the interview Christie was expected to
1. show his knowledge of banking procedures.
 2. react quickly to new information so as not to lose any points.
 3. avoid saying anything inappropriate.
 4. express satisfaction with the prospect of an early pension.
- A4. Christie got the job because
1. he gave fewer wrong answers than the other applicants.
 2. the bank's retirement scheme did not appeal to the other applicants.
 3. he was prepared to receive a small salary.
 4. the bank expected young recruits to leave within a short time.
- A5. What did Christie expect from his future job?
1. The work would be rather intensive.
 2. The bank would be as sheltered as his school was.
 3. The work would be creative enough.
 4. It might not be so easy to get on well with his colleagues.
- A6. Which is true of the bank interior?
1. The rich décor didn't suit its present function.
 2. It didn't provide enough room for computers.
 3. It had recently been decorated in expensive wood and stone.
 4. It added greatly to the bank's reputation.
- A7. When Christie worked at the bank
1. it took him a long time to learn to do his job properly.
 2. he often made miscalculations.
 3. his job involved working each two days out of three.
 4. he corrected mistakes made by other accountants.
- A8. What happened each time Christie made a banking error?
1. The Assistant Accountant would correct him in a fatherly manner.
 2. One of his colleagues would report it to the Manager.
 3. He had to follow an established procedure.
 4. The Manager would call him to his office.

Answer key: 1-3, A2-2, A3-3, A4-4, A5-1, A6-1, A7-2, A8-3.