

After working in a position in the criminal justice field for about five months, I am just beginning to realize how much the criminal justice program has influenced my thought processes and actions I have been taking these past months. When I first started to work at my job as a loss prevention agent, I thought of it as something that would get me by until I graduated and could do something else that would pay more money. When I realized I could use my current job as a way of earning six more college credits that I needed instead of taking two more classes this summer and also working the job anyway I jumped at the chance to do it. As the summer progressed going to work became something I enjoyed doing and even looked forward to.

Many skills that I have used during my experience at Bealls were given to me through my education in the criminal justice program. The first thing that really shocked me when I first started working at Bealls was the punishment that most shoplifters get when they are caught shoplifting. There was an attitude held by co-workers that the shoplifters we caught were never receiving just punishment for their crime. At first I agreed with them and thought there should be stiffer penalties for shoplifting. When I think back to a class like punishment and society, my opinion of punishing these shoplifters totally changed. In the past five months while working at Bealls, I have had approximately forty to fifty shoplifters prosecuted for stealing merchandise. If you locked up all the shoplifters in the county for almost any jail time at all there would be no room for real criminals. The criminal justice program taught me to think about consequences of the criminal justice system's actions. Many people today would probably agree that all criminals should be dealt with harshly and very punitive. The criminal justice system has given me the ability to think past the want to punish all criminals and make them all pay

harshly for their crimes. The experience at Bealls has put a real person in the shoes of the hypothetical criminals I've been hearing about for the past two years. This experience has given me first hand knowledge of what a criminal record does to someone. I recently had to go to court to testify against a shoplifter I stopped. Paperwork that I had sent to the state attorney's office had been overlooked and a restitution hearing was set that I was subpoenaed to attend. While waiting to testify outside the courtroom the subject arrived and sat next to me and probably didn't realize who I was. A few minutes later the state's attorney for the case arrived looking to talk to both of us. During the conversation the subject stipulated to the restitution that I was seeking. The subject then began to tell me and the attorney about how much hardship this case had caused her. The subject lost her job and couldn't find another due to her criminal record she now had. The subject said the case caused many hardships between herself and family and friends. In other cases it's harder to find sympathy. I had a shoplifter who was running from me and bit me twice while I was trying to handcuff her. I ended up needing a visit to the emergency room, a shot, and blood tests.

The benefit of completing my assigned tasks is the knowledge gained through real life experience. Someone can tell you as much about something and give you all the information available on something, but until you can experience the situation first hand you may never really know anything about it. This experience has taught me the benefit of building strong working relationships with co-workers. More information has come to me than I could have ever found because of strong relationships being developed within the organization. Strong relationships have also developed through law enforcement in the local area. I have become familiar with most of the Milton police department in

working at Bealls. A particular Santa Rosa county deputy comes by the Tiger Point location just to chat sometimes. I feel this experience had built ties within the community and has developed my people skills significantly.

This experience has led me to be interested in staying in the loss prevention side of the criminal justice system. My mom, who is a elementary school teacher, told me many years ago that I should find a job that I enjoyed doing. No matter how much a job pays, it could never be as rewarding as a career that I enjoy. If I could give advice to someone wishing to do an internship, I would suggest they get one that they think they'll enjoy doing. I would recommend doing an internship that pays for their work. I would strongly encourage someone to do an internship at Bealls. Bealls offers an extremely flexible schedule(I know it's flexible because I make it) and a paycheck for the hours you work.