



Ken's Krew: Placing and Training at The Home Depot

*Thomas Brown
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During his final year at Burlington High School, Thomas was referred to Ken's Krew, formally known as Ken's Kids Inc., by his Transition Coordinator and DVR Counselor. At the time, Thomas was looking for a part-time job that would be flexible with his college schedule in the fall, and that would help pay for his car insurance and gas. Thomas' parents, school staff and DVR counselor felt that Ken's Krew would be a good match because it offered extensive on the job support. The three months of side by side intensive job coaching provided by a Home Depot trained vocational trainer would allow Thomas enough time to become comfortable with his job duties, build self confidence and establish natural supports within the store.

Upon meeting Thomas, Ken's Krew vocational trainer Karen La Pera immediately recognized that Thomas had many strengths and abilities that would serve him well at The Home Depot. These strengths included superior memorization skills, meticulous organizational skills, a gentle and kind personality, a strong desire to follow through on all tasks, motivation, and previous work experience at a CVS Pharmacy and McDonalds.

After participating in Ken's Krew's five step assessment process (paper application, candidate interview, store assessment, parent interview, and manager's interview), Thomas was accepted into the Ken's Krew program. Thomas waited patiently for several months until hours became available at a neighboring Home Depot in Ewing, NJ. The Ewing Home Depot requested help in the Lumber Department with sweeping, down stocking, and flat stacking. Although this was not Thomas' ideal job match, he decided to pursue the opportunity, guided by the advice of his parents and job coach, who felt that if Thomas proved himself as a hard worker within the Lumber Department, perhaps another opportunity within the store might open up. Additionally, Thomas felt that the opportunity to be physical in the Lumber Department would be challenging and fun.

After several weeks, Thomas proved that he was a hard worker and dedicated to his job. His co-workers relied on him to help with special projects within the department. Soon thereafter, Karen helped advocate for a department change for Thomas. Although the entire store recognized that Thomas was very productive, it was clear that the Lumber Department, which included building materials and roofing, was a bit too technical for him. Thomas was asked many questions by experienced contractors that he was not able to answer. This was very frustrating for him.

At that point, Karen introduced Thomas to the Paint Department, which seemed to be a much better fit. Because the Paint Department is smaller and less technical, Thomas was able to learn more quickly and as a result, he could provide better customer service. On a typical day, Thomas mixes paint, organizes caulk, down stocks paint brushes, provides shelf maintenance for the spray paints, collects cardboard, and answers countless customer questions.

If asked about the most challenging part of his job, Thomas would quickly respond, “Customer Service”. Understandably, the uncertainty surrounding what a customer might ask, can create some anxiety for Thomas. During intensive training, Karen focused the majority of her training on building Thomas’ confidence when dealing with customer questions. This was accomplished by, practicing various customer scenarios, modeling good customer service, establishing strong natural supports within the store and constantly reminding Thomas that it is ok to say, “I’m in training, but let me find someone that can answer that question for you”.

The Home Depot is an extremely supportive employer. In addition to offering the support of a job coach and relocating his department, the store worked with Thomas and his job coach to establish a set schedule that made Thomas most successful. Initially, Thomas worked two days a week, each five hour shifts. However, during his intensive training, it was determined that a five hour shift was too long of a shift. Thomas became tired and less productive by the end of his shift. In working with store management, Karen helped advocate to cut Thomas’ shifts to four hour. Soon after, a third four hour shift was added to his schedule when it was observed how productive Thomas could be within his four hour schedule.

After three and a half months of intensive one-on-one job coaching, Karen began phasing away. Thomas has since won two “Homer Badges” for outstanding customer service. Additionally, Thomas increased his work stamina and is now working three, five hour shifts for a total of 15 hours a week. Karen continues to spot check Thomas one to two times per month to ensure that he is performing all of his job duties and remains comfortable in his current position.