

# The 10 secrets to successful locuming

By Shaun Hockey

Thanks you for subscribing to my newsletter

I have been asked on a numerous occasions about how to make a career working as a locum pharmacist as rewarding as possible. This eBook is designed to pass on my own secrets and those of the 1250 locums we have working through PL-UK.

As the cliché goes, it's not rocket science, but as the pharmacy degree contains precisely zero training on marketing yourself or setting the foundations for a successful business, I hope that these ten tips will be useful to you.

Please feel free to pass the eBook onto friends and colleagues as I hope there is something in there for everyone, even the most experienced locum.

To your success

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## **Houses without firm foundations fall down in a strong wind**

Before you even start to work as a locum gets the building blocks in position for success. The first person I would look to talk to is not a locum agency, pharmacy owner or an area coordinator it's a good accountant. They will be able to put the foundations in place to maximise the potential rewards you can realise from working as a locum. They will discuss how you will trade either as self-employed or Limited Company. They will talk to you about how you should keep records, charge for your services, register with the Inland Revenue and give you an idea of the percentage you will need to save to pay your tax liabilities at the end of the year.

They may also talk to you about pension planning, insurance, and income protection. On income protection don't sign up to any policy until you have talked to the PL-UK office. We have contacts in a little known company who offer fantastic value for money and a pay out at retirement age and the best thing of all is that it's **exclusive** to the pharmacy profession.

If these foundations are in place, when you need to pay your tax bill or fill in your annual return, all the information is to hand and life is easy. If it's not, life can be decidedly uncomfortable and the whole thing could come crashing down on you.

## **If you don't know where the goal is what chance have you got of scoring?**

Set a target for you annual earnings so you know if you've had a good year or not. Most locums drift from job to job and don't have a clue how much they want to earn. They just want to earn more!

So for example if you want to earn £50,000 a year and you want to have four weeks holiday a year you could achieve in a number of ways:

1. Work five 8.5 hr days (42.5 hrs) at £25 per hour for 48 weeks
2. Work four 8.5 hours days a week at £25 plus 2 hours travel time for 48 weeks.
3. Work 5.5 days a week at £22.50 for 48 weeks a year.

Take whatever target salary you want and work out what you need charge so you can build the goal and shoot right in the middle!

### **Know your value... and increase it.**

In any business the market sets the price. So if there is an over supply of garden peas the price comes down. However if the garden peas are “ Not just Garden Peas, these are M+S garden peas” people will still pay a premium for what they perceive to be a good value premium pea.

The same thing applies to locum pharmacists. If you are in an area of the country where locums are in short supply e.g. North East England, South West England, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland you can charge a premium. However if you are in London, the capital with the highest living costs, you will ironically earn the lowest rates as there is an over supply of locums.

However in both cases you can dramatically increase the rate you earn by taking the simple steps that follow.

### **Look the part**

The old impulse advert used to say “first impressions last” and it’s so true. If you turn up to work looking like a highly trained professional you will be paid like a highly trained professional. If you turn up looking like a tramp.....

## Act the part

Many shops run on locum pharmacists and the staff will see potentially 100's of locums over the course of the year so you've got to stick in their minds so they ask for you back. At PL-UK we have locums booked up for the next twelve months at £25+2 because the pharmacies request a particular locum. They don't want a pharmacist, they want their pharmacist.

How do they do it? Looking the part is the first step. Then they usually follow a very similar pattern:

1. They call the pharmacy the day before to introduce themselves and to find out where to park, confirm opening times and ask who they need to report to the following morning
2. They check the route (Usually Sat Nav) and plan to arrive 15 minutes early
3. The first question they when they arrive is "What would you like me to do?"
4. Try to remember names, especially dispensers!
5. If there is a lull in prescriptions ask them if there's anything they would like you to do
6. Be qualified! Ensure that you are MUR, Repeat Dispensing, Minor Ailments accredited etc so you can continue service as normal
7. If the shop doesn't carry out many MUR's try to do as many as you can – stand out from the crowd!
8. Chat to the staff. There's nothing worse than a locum who sits in the corner doing nothing. Chat and show an interest in the staff and if any of them are doing any training as if you can help.

## Leave a lasting impression

On leaving the pharmacy leave a note explaining what has happened to the pharmacists on duty the next day but don't just leave any old note. Produce a memo template off word or similar that personalises the template to you. This portrays a very professional image to the pharmacist that works the next day and dramatically improves the

chances of **them** requesting you to work the next time they need cover even if they've never met or worked with you!!

## **Work only with people you want to be associated with**

It wouldn't matter if Skoda produced the most stupendous car in history, many people wouldn't but it simply because it's a Skoda. The same applies to locums. There are a number of agencies out there with terrible reputations and their locums become tarnished by association with that agency. So, even if the locum goes to another agency they can't find work

I suggest using the three c's test to decide which agency to work with:

### **Check**

1. Check to see if the agency is registered with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation [www.rec.uk.com](http://www.rec.uk.com) is the trade body for recruitment and locum agencies. If the agency is registered that would indicate that they operate in a professional manner. If they aren't I'd ask myself "Why not?"
2. Check that they are approved suppliers to at least some of the major pharmacy operators. The big companies go through a type of due diligence checks on agencies before adding them to their approved lists. So if they are on the list, this again indicates a level of professionalism
3. Check with other locums to see what their experiences are of working with a particular agency.
4. Check the agency staff. Go and meet them if you can. That way you will get to know them better and they're much more likely to call you first with bookings if they've met you in person.

### **Challenge**

Give the agency three dates you know you're available to locum to see if they can find work for you. If they can, great. If not it might be worth looking elsewhere.

## **Choose**

After checking and challenging choose two agencies to work with and see which one comes up with the best work for you. After a month choose one but keep the other sweet, you never know when you might need them!

## **As Jamie Olliver says... “Try something new today”**

One of the best things that locuming allows for is flexibility. Work for as many companies as you can so that on your CV you have a long list of companies who have been happy with the service you provide. Even better, work across other sectors of the profession. If you have hospital, prison service or PCT experience under your belt your earnings potential can soar. At PL-UK we find it much easier to fill the diary of a locum with hospital experience than just community and it also allows you to undertake block bookings in hospital which traditionally attract higher rates.

## **Expose yourself in public as often as you can!**

To ensure that you obtain as much work as you need to achieve your goals, you need to expose yourself as much as possible! This means getting your name out there so people know of you, know how good you are and know how difficult it is to book you as everyone else is after your free dates. Writing to local pharmacies is one way of doing this or registering with reputable agencies. Other ways include using YouTube or social networking sites and even via your own website.

Increasing numbers of pharmacy contractors use Google to look for locum pharmacists and there are some great sites for individual pharmacists out there. Some even have an availability calendar on them. But don't just try one avenue, expose yourself as widely as possible!

## Work to live, don't live to work

All this talk of targeting, goals and exposing yourself etc can take your eye off what really matters. **Always remember to work to live not live to work.** Talk to your family, friends etc and make sure you keep an accurate diary with you at all time with your existing bookings and really important dates like birthdays, anniversaries, holidays etc Cancelling a pre-existing booking because you forgot your other half's birthday doesn't go down well with either the inconvenienced pharmacy or your other half.

So, as I said at the beginning it isn't rocket science but setting the foundations right and selling your services as professionally and widely as possible can make a world of difference.

## The last word...

For the last word let me tell you the story of a pharmacist, Bert. Bert worked for one of the major pharmacy operators. He managed over 150 members of staff, a business turning over in excess of £25 million a year and set off to work at around 7am, returning home after 7pm just as the kids were going to bed. Bert had to work three Saturdays in four so he had had to stop playing rugby

Bert got fed up with his lot in life and decided to work as a locum. He had seen many locums working in his pharmacy and was absolutely convinced he could provide a better service than them. He left his job in January 2004, set out his stall to provide pharmacies with a professional, reliable locum service and has worked every day he has wanted to ever since. Bert now only works close to home, earns 70% more than he did when he managed all those people and hasn't worked a Saturday since. He has even started playing rugby again! Bert is a much happier pharmacist,

If you would like a more information about working as a locum pharmacist please don't hesitate to call me on 0800 8818844, visit our website [www.pluk.co.uk](http://www.pluk.co.uk) or Email [bert@pluk.co.uk](mailto:bert@pluk.co.uk)

Shaun Hockey qualified as a pharmacist in 1993 after undertaking his pre-reg in Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield and a community pharmacy in Ilkley. He started off his career working as a community locum across the North of England before taking a permanent position in inner city Leeds. Following a stint as the manager of “Ye Oldest Chymiste Shoppe in England” in Knaresborough. Shaun went to work to Boots working through relief, pharmacy manager and store manager roles before leaving to set up PL-UK in 2004. He now spends most of his time developing the business but still works as a locum in various prisons across the North East