

Magistrate Case Study: Billy

Why did you become a Magistrate?

It's a chance to put something back into society. It can be challenging but also rewarding as you get a lot back from it.

What made you chose to become a Magistrate rather than another role in the community?

Probably because you can see this as a chance to make a difference in your own community. An opportunity to influence some of the bad things you see happening and want to stop. However, it's not as simple as most people think and we are governed by structured guidelines and have to work within limits.

Did you have knowledge of the law beforehand?

No, not at all! You don't need to be legally qualified; the legal advisors make sure we don't fall foul of the law. The training is very comprehensive and covers all of the areas we need to know to sit as magistrates. The Magistrates Guidelines outline what we can and can't do and where we have some discretion.

What did you need to do to become a Magistrate? Was it difficult?

I didn't find it difficult to join. There is a formal application process which includes an application form and an interview process. If successful you complete a comprehensive initial training programme before sitting in court. It doesn't matter what you do for a living; you may be unemployed,

self employed, employed in a small or very large company. Magistrates are from and represent the community; therefore there is a mixture of religions, political backgrounds and jobs that people do.

How do you fit your role as a Magistrate in with the rest of your life?

I sit approximately two days every five weeks. As I run my own business I need to bring extra staff in to cover my days at court. If you are employed you may need to get permission from your employer for time off. Sometimes it is difficult; however, you can influence when you sit and plan your sittings around your availability

What is the training like to become a Magistrate?

The training is very comprehensive and initially there is a lot. However, the courts do try to accommodate magistrate's needs. Some training is arranged for evenings and weekends so that it doesn't interfere with work. Once the initial training is completed and you have been sitting for about a year to 18 months you are appraised. After that, the training and appraisal are cyclical to make sure we are competent to continue to sit on the Bench.

There are many skills which are transferable and can be used in both the courts and other parts of your life. For example, in my business I make use of a structured approach to how I arrange my day and organise my work; skills which are essential when sitting in court and are covered in magistrate's basic training.

What are the difficulties of being a Magistrate?

You are bound to find frustrations in every job and there are times when you wish you could do more. Some people appear in front of the bench time after time and no matter what you do, they will continue to re offend. Prison is not always the answer; sometimes it's more challenging if you give them some form of probation to try and change their ways and a community based punishment. Unfortunately the public don't always agree!

What do you enjoy about being a Magistrate?

Camaraderie amongst your fellow magistrates. You sit as a bench of three and you all have an equal say in the decision making process. It's a real team effort and it doesn't matter how long you have been a magistrate; you all carry the same weight.

You never know what you are going to get on each day. Any crime that happens in England goes to the Magistrate's Court first. We deal with 95% of all crime to a conclusion. There are very few cases that are dealt with at Crown Court.

Are there any experiences of being a Magistrate that are memorable?

Although there are problems with the same people coming back before the bench time after time, as a lot of them get older and more mature they do seem to get a bit more sensible. You sentence some defendants to drug rehabilitation programmes to try and reduce their offending. As part of the programme they attend review hearings at

court to discuss their progress and as part of the review we get reports on how they are doing. For some of them, this programme makes a real difference; they stop offending and you can actually see the difference in their appearance each time they attend court.

Would you recommend becoming a Magistrate to other people?

Definitely, based on my experience, you learn a lot. Yes at times it is frustrating and you have to bite your tongue; you can't send everybody to prison forever!

It is very good, you get lots of training to help you learn the role and you get the opportunity to meet colleagues from a wide range of businesses. Everyone is supportive and you are never left on your own.

The best thing to do if you are interested is to go and sit at the back of the court and observe what happens. The hardest part is walking through the court door. Once inside, I'm sure you'll find it very interesting and see how things get done.

Anyone can go in and it's free!!

If you would like more information visit the [Magistrate Profile page](#).