**Sample one**

**Retail Mystery Shoppers**

One industry I think would most benefit from the use of mystery shoppers is auto sales.  Purchasing a new vehicle is often a cumbersome process and there are countless stories of the overbearing salesman turning this process into a complete hassle.  Therefore, I think leveraging mystery shoppers could help auto dealers refine their sales approach to better close deals, while generating higher customer satisfaction.  Insights which might be derived from such a program would include: how quickly is a customer approached upon driving onto the lot, how many sales associates approach a single customer, how many prices are offered by the dealer while negotiating, how many cars are shown to the customer before he/she finds the one they want to purchase, and ultimately how long does the purchase process take.  Each step of the process contributes to customer satisfaction; therefore, ensuring optimal standards are in place as to avoid overwhelming the customer is critical.  The mystery shopper could use evaluative criteria to derive a customer satisfaction index for each regional dealership and award appraisal scores accordingly.

**University Mystery Students**

I do see value in having active mystery shoppers at UTD.  The primary and most beneficial insights would come from having these mystery students attend classes, both on campus and online.  One insight which would prove most valuable is student engagement rates.  This is nearly impossible to gauge via a third party rating and review website.  Therefore, a mystery student could observe classroom engagement and evaluate how well the professor solicits interest and intrigue about a given subject.  Are the students simply present to collect their attendance grade and observe their laptops or are they actively invested and intrigued to learn the subject matter?  I would propose this mystery student attend a series of lectures before asserting a conclusion.  Also, I believe this exercise would be equally interesting if conducted in an online forum.  By attending a class virtually, the mystery student could (without bias) assess the course layout, level of engagement, lecture quality and overall usefulness of content.  The critical value of leveraging mystery students is the elimination of grade and/or professor bias. Rating and review websites available today tend to capture the extremes, either those who loved or strongly disliked a particular class.  Such ratings are generally reflective of grade bias; therefore, mystery students provide a viable alternative to more accurately reflect the student body sentiment.

Sample 2

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**Pick a Job in which "mystery shoppers" might be helpful**

The retail banking industry is one job that comes to mind where the use of mystery shoppers could be very beneficial.  The reasons are two fold: 1) this is a customer facing and service based job (tellers, branch managers, etc.) and 2) employees are handling highly confidential customer information as well as exchanging large amounts of money.  A mystery shopper could be used to provide data on friendliness of the customer interaction by employees as well as how effectively they go through the proper procedures when making transactions.  For example, a mystery shopper could intentionally attempt to cash a check that is not made out to them, or make a withdrawal from an account in which they are not a signer.  The employee would be "graded" on how well they handle the situation or if they even catch the mistake at all. This data would be valuable to the bank, because an employee who does not stick to the proper controls learned in training could be a very big liability to the bank and its customers.  The bank could incorporate these mystery shops into every customer-facing employee's performance-appraisal by making it part of their annual bonus pay out.  A grading scale for the mystery shops could be developed with corresponding bonus earnings for each grade. This would create a monetary incentive for the bank's employees to stick to their training, protect customer information and money, and protect the bank from liability.

**Could the university use mystery shoppers?**

The only setting in which I could see mystery shoppers being useful to the university would be through interactions with the school's administration, particularly the counselors. The educational counselors that interact with students on planning for their courses, graduation, and scholarship matters could be mystery shopped to ensure that they are maintaining professionalism and doing their jobs correctly.  I do not believe that "mystery students" are necessary for the professors because of readily available online information such as [www.ratemyprofessor.com](http://www.ratemyprofessor.com/).  Students can easily search any given professor's name to see what past students have to say about the quality of the course and instruction.  I believe this is an even stronger measure of a professor's quality because the students who provide the reviews have gone through an entire semester with the professor instead of just having one single interaction as would be the case with a "mystery student".

Sample 3

**Pick a job in which “mystery shoppers” might provide helpful and unique data:**

        A good location to place a “mystery shopper” would be on a major cruise line.  Due to the fact that major organizations have so many ships in use, once the boats leave the dock, the operations essentially become autonomous and which allows the ship’s captain to use a **decentralized approach**when selecting their crew.  As a result, an experienced shopper would be able to recognize the good ships and bad ships through **environmental scanning**.  In doing so, I think they would quickly be able to determine what is being done well and what is being done poorly.  It would be a lot easy for Carnival Cruises to collect accurate data from someone that is dressed like they are going on vacation just trying to let loose and have fun.  Due to the fact they would not be walking around with a clip board like a health inspector checking boxes, they can truly provide an accurate **evaluation.**

            If this individual were to take even a three day cruise, they would be able to collect information regarding all six criteria for assessing value of performance.  For example, solely by getting a meal on the boat they would be able to evaluate the **quality** of the food served, the **timeliness** of the wait staff and determine how pleasant or unpleasant the **interpersonal contact** was between the server, host or hostess and manager.  Additionally, should the shopper be used on a number of trips, they would be able to assess which experiences were more pleasant than others and by taking a count the corporate office could get a total**quantity**of their good ships along with the poor ones.  This would also provide information for which ships need more**supervision** to ensure a better customer experience and which do not.  Lastly, if the shopper were to notice price differences on the various ships, the company could use this information to set ideal price points and act in a **cost-effective manner.**

            All of this information could be analyzed in a similar fashion to Home Depot and used to determine the Captain’s annual appraisal, bonus, base salary increases and objectives for the next sailing season. Overall, I think placing a passenger on a cruise line is the ultimate use of the “mystery shopper” because there is so many areas of the ship to analyze and evaluate that it would be very difficult for an employee to become aware that they were being evaluated.

**Could you university use “mystery shoppers”? What would the “shoppers” look for?  Are “mystery students” really necessary given the opportunity available to collect other presumably valid data?**

* I certainly think UTD and any other university could use “mystery shoppers” to validate what the administration assumes is occurring in the classroom is actually occurring
	+ By planting these individuals a classroom they would be capable of **environmentally scanning** the classroom, assessing their fellow students within the UTD **internal environment**
	+ The experiment would not need to last entire semester either because an accurate **labor analysis**could be done after just a few weeks (though it might be suspicious if a student is only in a class for two or three lessons)
* It would be similar to the times when a dean sits in on a class but unlike those moments when the professor:
	+ Knows ahead of time about the visit and can be prepped
	+ The professor will be able to relax during the session because he or she is not concerned with each and every thing they say and will be able to truly exhale and just cover the material they wished to
* This would not necessarily have negative intentions should the professor not teach the correct material effectively but also an opportunity to be praised for inspiring students to learn
* The “mystery shoppers” would be looking that the professor is teaching the material they were instructed to be the dean’s office and how well they teach
	+ Are the students engaged?  Is the class discussing topics or is it merely lecturing throughout the entire session?  Would a student be more likely to take another class with the same professor because of their teaching style?
* The “mystery students” are not necessarily necessary but would truly paint a more accurate picture of the learning environment
	+ Data is great at a higher level to analyze but it does not capture the learning experiences of students
		- To get this knowledge, people need to be going into a classroom and experiencing it first-hand
* The use of these students would also provide the administration information beyond data to factor in when deciding if they would be interested in **downsizing**
	+ Contrary option would be to promote a professor using **internal recruiting** because of their proven abilities
	+ Should the information that is provided back indicates poor performance, the other option would be to look elsewhere with **external recruiting** to bring in candidates that may employ a **new approach** that may better inspire students

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