

Working as a Switchboard Operator

“Operator! Operator! Get me Dr. Brown, quick! It’s an emergency!” The operator taking the call scoots her chair closer to her switchboard. Her eyes urgently scan the rows of plug-in jacks before her. “One, two, and over...” she murmurs, her hand shaking with tense excitement. She sees the correct extension and plugs the wire in. “Dr. Brown will be on the line momentarily,” she assures the frantic caller. Seconds later she hears the doctor’s voice on the line and sighs, relieved. She eases the headset off, smiling at the operator next to her. It was another job well done. The occupation of a switchboard operator began shortly after the telephone appeared in cities and homes, in 1878. It was a lively, interesting employment that kept employees hopping to match the plug to the correct extension and connect it. If I had lived back in the day, the job of switchboard operator would have been my choice because of its interesting situations, invigorating environment, and the good communication and listening skills it would teach me.

First, I would love this job because of the interesting situations I would become aware of. As an operator, I would be allotted a certain location. Either I would be answering and directing long distance calls from foreign places to the US and vice-versa, or I would be connecting local calls. Either way, I would hear many captivating situations, such as an emergency call for the doctor, or perhaps the police. If it were just a regular call, the situation and circumstances still might be intriguing. Mysterious addresses, foreign accents, and different names might be spoken into my earpiece daily. That would keep my day far from boring, and give me inspiration for stories.

Secondly, this occupation stands out to me because of its invigorating environment. Rows upon rows of operators extend the length of the room, each person clad with their earpieces and mouthpieces. Cheerful voices mingle into a constant babble as the workers answer calls. Hurry is in the air as each operator scrambles to find the right extension for their caller. All is a flurry of excitement and business. This atmosphere is very appealing to me. Dull moments can be done away with, and all of my energy can be used to its full potential with this job! I would love to be busily hurrying to fulfill tasks and answer calls, as well as being able to rub shoulders with other smiling operators. Possibly phones now seem to be much more efficient without the use of an operator, but now we do not get a chance to be part of this hurry-scurry, friend-making, energetic environment for a workplace.

Finally, I would desire to be a switchboard operator because it would teach me important life skills: good communication and good listening. The focus of this job would be first to listen carefully so that I would not need to ask for the caller to repeat what they said, and then communicating with the person about the line they were calling, such as which city and the extension needed. Doing this all day would very quickly enhance my ability to listen well and speak slowly, clearly, and carefully. As I progressed, I would be pushed to strengthen and solidify these skills to keep up with competition. Certainly this skill would not go to waste in other aspects of life either. Good communication skills would improve my chances of securing a higher-end job, and daily interactions with people that I meet would be smoother. That would all be possible through the job of a switchboard operator.

I really would have enjoyed the position of switchboard operator because of the diverse circumstances, energetic atmosphere, and the skills of listening and communication I would learn.

Present-day workers probably do not realize what a cheerful, stimulating, and character-building job they are missing out on now that operators of this kind no longer exist. There are still some similar phone jobs today, but nothing can compare to how it was like being a switchboard operator in the good old days. I would have chosen the job of switchboard operator, had I lived "back in the day."